DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 170 FL 011 998

AUTHOR	Adams, Marianne Lehr, Ed.: Frith, James R., Ed.
TITLE	Testing Kit: French and Spanish.
INSTITUTION	Foreign Service (Dept. of State), Washington, D.C. Foreign Service Inst.
PUB DATE	[80]
NOTE	151p.: For earlier version, see ED 172 588.
AVAILABLE FROM	Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402 (Stock No. 044-000-01756-3, $4.75).
LANGUAGE	English: French: Spanish
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Achievement Rating: *French: *Interviews: *Language Proficiency: *Language Tests: Reading Skills: *Spanish: Speech Skills: Testing
IDENTIFIERS	*Foreign Service Institute DC

ABSTRACT

This guide is intended for the use of the interviewers who determine the oral proficiency ratings of candidates for the Foreign Service. The following materials have been collected: (1) "The Measurement of Speaking and Reading Proficiency in a Foreign Language," (2) "Definitions of Absolute Ratings," (3) "Factors in Speaking Proficiency," (4) "Self-Appraisal of Speaking Proficiency," (5) "FSI Language Proficiency Tests," (6) "Assignment of + Ratings," (7) "Comments and Suggestions on FSI Testing Procedure," (8) "Language Proficiency Check List," (9) "Weighting Table and Conversion Table," (10) "Suggested Topics for an Oral Test," (11) "Questions for Examiners," (12) "Suggestions for Selection of Reading Materials for Tests," (13) "On Testing for S-1+ and S-2," (14) "Elicitation Techniques for Higher Levels," (15) comments and suggestions by FSI French and Spanish staff, (16) "Grammatical Benchmarks for French and Spanish," (17) "On Eliciting Features of French and Spanish," (18) "S-Ratings in Spanish: Criteria and Characteristics," (19) "The Art of Interviewing," (20) "Steps in a Speaking Test," (21) "Interpreter Situations," and (22) descriptions of tapes. (JB)

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TESTING KIT

FRENCH AND SPANISH

ED195170

FL011998

with articles by
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FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE
1946

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

Edited by
MARIANNE LEHR ADAMS
and
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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Stock Number 044-000-01756-3

$4.75

PREFACE

In the 23 years since the Foreign Service Institute Language Testing Unit was established in 1956, FSI examiners have administered some 60,000 oral interview test in more than 60 languages to an adult clientele which is made up of the officers and employees of the foreign affairs agencies of the U. S. government and their spouses. The Testing Kit (French and Spanish), *which comprises this manual and the accompanying set of tape recordings, was put together originally for internal use in training language examiners at the Foreign Service Institute and in maintaining oral testing standards.*

The system used for scoring speaking proficiency is a scale from S-0 to S-5. FSI uses a parallel R-0 to R-5 scale for scoring reading and normally scores both skills in the tests it conducts. The Testing Kit, *however, is devoted primarily to the testing of oral proficiency.*

This is a revised edition which differs from the original version mainly in providing additional guidance on conducting oral interview tests. The manual contains a collection of papers and memoranda by FSI examiners, including a comprehensive article (1967) by Claudia P. Wilds, former head of the Language Testing Unit, and her notes to the FSI language staff between 1958 and 1968 clarifying standards and procedures for evaluating proficiency. It also provides definitions of the levels of the FSI scale as well as commentaries on the 15 French tests and 17 Spanish tests recorded on the accompanying cassettes.

It is important to keep in mind that the definitions are descriptions, not standards per se. Just as it would be difficult to measure the dimensions of a surface with only a description of a foot or a meter, so it is difficult to measure oral proficiency with only a description of S-2 or S-3 or S-4. A basic purpose of this manual is to give examples of French and Spanish proficiency at the different levels of the FSI scale in order to provide standards for comparison. The ultimate standard, the ultimate criterion reference, is the proficiency of educated native speakers.

A related purpose is to describe techniques for conducting interviews and eliciting a sample of speech with enough scope in grammatical and lexical variety to provide an adequate basis for evaluation.

The definitions of levels have proved broad enough to apply to all languages, yet specific enough to arbitrate decisions in particular instances. Some of the characteristics of the test score are the following:

- *The S-rating is a sum of interrelated factors. Candidates control, to varying degrees, the pronunciation, the grammar and the lexicon and are capable of varying degrees of comprehension and fluency. The five factors are simultaneously displayed in all conversation. The FSI rating system appraises the factors in their normal conversational environment, gives a numerical value to each and translates the sum of the values into an S-rating by a conversion table.*

- *The S-rating is a measure of the degree of acquisition of conversation skills: speaking and understanding in a dialogue situation. It is a measure of the degree to which the candidate's phonological, grammatical and lexical range is coextensive with that of an educated native speaker, and the degree to which his comprehension and fluency approach the native speaker's. The S-rating is non-specific as to performance on these factors, and hence non-diagnostic (although the Check List on which the S-rating is based does specifically evaluate each factor). The S-rating also has nothing to say about the non-linguistic competencies or the personality of the candidate. It is simply a global measure of the candidate's oral proficiency in comparison with the proficiency of educated native speakers.*

- *The S-rating is a prediction. On the basis of a sample of conversation elicited in an interview usually lasting 15 minutes to a half hour, the examiner places a qualitative and quantitative value (say S-3) on the candidate's proficiency as demonstrated at the time of the test. In effect the examiner predicts that for some reasonable period of time after the test the candidate will be able to perform at the level of linguistic effectiveness indicated by the test score.*

- *The S-rating is an estimate of competence as gauged by one performance in the presence of FSI testers. What is predicted is that under similar circumstances the candidate can be expected to perform at the same level. Sharply altered circumstances--e.g. significantly more (or less) stress, significantly higher (or lower) noise level--may of course either inhibit or enhance performance in the foreign language as it might in one's native language. It cannot be predicted how proficiently the candidate will perform in all circumstances, but the test establishes how well (as a minimum) the candidate is capable of performing.*

- *The S-rating is a "promise". In the context in which FSI works, the test score is an assurance which the FSI examiner gives to the Ambassador or other manager for whom the candidate will be working that the candidate can perform at the indicated level of linguistic skill. The range of possibilities from S-0 to S-5 is a continuum within which levels of proficiency are definable, exemplifiable in broad terms and measurable--but not with micrometer precision. The examiner must therefore make judgement calls in the margins between points on the scale. The promissory character of the rating provides guidance as to how these judgements should be exercised: close decisions must be made on the conservative side. It is not a service either to the candidate or to the candidate's potential supervisor to indicate more than he or she can deliver.*

In order to make the Testing Kit *more self-sustaining, FSI sought the assistance of colleagues on college and university campuses during the early months of 1979 in a project which involved extensive participation by twenty faculty members representing ten schools.*

Twelve of the twenty studied the Testing Kit, *attended either one or two testing conferences at FSI, rated at least a dozen additional tape-recorded tests, discussed them with FSI examiners by telephone, conducted testing interviews on their respective campuses, sent tape-recordings of them to FSI and subsequently discussed these by telephone with FSI examiners. The participants on the average agreed with FSI examiners exactly or within half a point in 96% of all tests after eight trial tests.*

Eight others studied the kit, likewise rated at least a dozen additional tape-recorded tests and discussed them by telephone with FSI examiners, but had no other contact with FSI. They agreed on the average with FSI examiners exactly or within half a point in 94% of all tests after eight trial tests.

It was clear that the earlier version of the Testing Kit, *which focused primarily on measurement* standards, *was effective in helping language teachers to calibrate themselves to rate tests accurately. It was also clear, however, that the earlier versions had a major weakness. While the participants reached high levels of agreement with FSI criterion scores in rating tests conducted by experienced examiners, they did not feel that the kit provided enough guidance to enable its users to elicit an equally adequate sample of speech themselves. As a consequence, the current version of the manual contains somewhat more detail on techniques of conducting oral interview tests.*

This edition has been expanded to include five articles not in the original version. Papers on interviewing and elicitation have been added by C. Cleland Harris, chairman of Romance languages, Stephen P. J. Zappala, head of the Spanish section, Catherine Hanna, a team coordinator for French and Jose Molina and Susana Framinan, team coordinators for Spanish.

The twelve participants in the Testing Kit *project who attended testing conferences at FSI were Roger Bensky and William Cressy of Georgetown University, Thomas Brown of Brigham Young University, Louis Elteto of Portland State College, Theresa Bonin and Gerard Ervin of Ohio State University, David Gobert of Southern Illinois University, Phyllis Johnson and Howard Young of Pomona College, Howard Lamson of Earlham College, John Rassias of Dartmouth College and William Samelson of San Antonio Community College.*

The eight who had the more limited contact with FSI were Jeanne Bernard, George T. Cabello, Eric Swenson and Frank Vecchio of Portland State College, James Taylor and Chantal Thompson of Brigham Young University and James Fife and Melvin Tolson of the University of Oklahoma.

The FSI examiners who handled the telephone discussions were Mme. Hanna for French and Susana Framinan and Sr. Molina for Spanish.

The voices of the testers on the tapes are those of Monique Cossard, head of the French section, Elisabeth DeMaynadier, Mme. Hanna, Francine Haughey, Angelo Mornu, Marie-Francoise Swanner in French; and Dr. Harris, Ms. Adams, Vicente Arbalaez, Manuel Barrero, Gloria Brakel, Marta Gowland, Jorge Krichmar, Isabel Lowery, Sr. Molina, Leonor Paine, Harry Rosser, Harlie L. Smith, Patricio Solis, Blanca Spencer, Jack Ulsh, Agustin Vilches and Mr. Zappala in Spanish.

The commentaries on French tests were prepared mainly by Mme. Hanna and Mme. Swanner with contributions from Brian Simblist. Harry Rosser, Don Bryan and Dr. Harris wrote the commentaries on the Spanish tests. The French portions were edited by Mr. Mornu and Mme. Cossard, the Spanish portions by Mr. Zappala. The tapes were edited by Jose Ramirez of the FSI language laboratory. Maryko Deemer of the publications office produced the camera ready copy for the manual. John McClelland of the audio- visual staff prepared the cover design.

It should be noted in closing that the testing procedure used at FSI is only one of many conceivable ways of applying standards to the measurement of oral proficiency. Its principal virtues are that it can be applied to any language and that it produces results which are generally accepted by an articulate Foreign Service clientele whose assignments and promotions are often governed by them. We would like to stress the primacy of standards *of measurement over* means *of measurement. FSI publishes this manual with the thought that the standards exemplified in it may facilitate communication about oral language proficiency and that others working with the standards may find additional techniques for applying them.*

James R. Frith

September 12, 1979

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY:

Examinee and candidate are used interchangeably to signify the person being tested.

Examiner is the person in charge of the test at FSI.

Interviewer is the person conducting the conversation in the test, sometimes called the native speaker.

Tester may be either examiner or interviewer.

Accent and Pronunciation are used interchangeably (pronunciation of individual sounds is not judged separately from pitch and stress).

THE MEASUREMENT OF SPEAKING[1] AND READING PROFICIENCY IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Claudia P. Wilds, ca. 1967

With an ever-increasing demand for multi-lingual Americans to fill business, government, and academic positions both at home and abroad, a need has developed for a meaningful and efficient way to describe proficiency in a foreign language. Such terms as "good," "fluent," or "bi-lingual," whether applied by teachers or supervisors to the competence of their students or employees or used as self-appraisal designations, have proved to be vague, unmeasurable, and open to many interpretations.

Since 1956 the Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State has been rating Government employees on a simple numerical scale which succinctly describes speaking and reading proficiency in a foreign language. This scale has become so widely known and well understood that statements like, "The Consul has an S-2 R-3 in Thai," or "That position requires someone with S-4 R-4 in French" are immediately intelligible within meaningful limits of accuracy to everyone concerned with personnel assignments in the numerous Government agencies who use the FSI testing facilities.

The usefulness of the system is based on careful and detailed definition in both linguistic and functional terms of each point on the scale.

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[1] Readers may wish to see also a paper by Ms. Wilds entitled The Oral Interview Test which is included in Testing Language Proficiency, Center for Applied Linguistics 1975, and which draws on materials in pp.1-6 of this manual.

This paper is principally concerned with the description of the testing procedures and evaluation techniques whereby the rating system is currently applied at the Foreign Service Institute.

BACKGROUND

Prior to 1952 there was no inventory of the language skills of Foreign Service Officers and, indeed, no device for assessing such skills. In that year, however, a new awareness of the need for such information led to preliminary descriptions of levels of proficiency and experimental rating procedures. By 1956 the present rating system and testing methods had been developed to a practicable degree.

Both the scope and the restrictions of the testing situation provided problems and requirements previously unknown in language testing. The range of these unique features is indicated below:

1) The need to assess both speaking and reading proficiency within a half-hour to an hour. The requirement was imposed principally by the limited time available in the examinee's crowded schedule.

2) The need to measure the complete range of language competence, from the skill acquired in 100 hours of training or a month of experience abroad to the native facility of someone whose entire education was in the foreign language.

3) A population consisting of all the kinds of Americans serving the United States overseas: diplomats (from career ambassadors to visa officers), secretaries, agricultural specialists, Peace Corps volunteers, soldiers, tax experts, and many others. They may have learned their language skills at home or on the job or through formal training, in any combination and to any degree. Generally no biographical information is available before the test.

4) The necessity for a rating system applicable to any language, easy to interpret by testers, examinees, and supervisors, and immediately useful in decisions about assignments, promotions, and job requirements.

5) The need for unquestioned face validity and reputation of high reliability: those using the test results to make decisions about the careers of others are themselves examinees and must have faith in the accuracy of their own ratings.

With these restrictions there was, from the beginning, very little choice in the kind of test that could be given. A structured interview custom-built to fit each examinee's experience and capabilities in the language promised to use the time allowed for the test with maximum efficiency. A rating scale, with units gross enough to ensure reasonable reliability, was developed on the basis of both linguistic and functional analyses. The scale is included as Appendix A.

Although both the testing procedure and the rating scale were first put to use more or less in their present form in 1956, a real measure of their effectiveness began in the summer of 1958, when the Department of State instituted a mandatory testing program. This lead was quickly followed by the U.S. Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, and then a number of other agencies; and the Language Testing Unit now administers over 3000 tests a year in approximately 40 languages. As a consequence, both testing techniques and rating criteria have been refined and elaborated to the point where they can be quickly and reliably learned by qualified linguists, language teachers, and native speakers.

Whenever possible the testing team consists of a native-speaking interviewer and a certified language examiner thoroughly familiar with the language. Ideally the native speaker is an experienced teacher of English speakers, has reasonably well-informed interest in current events throughout the world, and has a warm, friendly, and tactful curiosity about all kinds of people. The examiner need not speak the language fluently, but should have very high aural comprehension and acute sensitivity to phonological, structural, and lexical errors. The more all these attributes are shared by both interviewer and examiner, the smoother and more reliable the test.

It is sometimes the case that the only native speaker available has none of the desired characteristics. If this is true, the examiner will need to change to a much more active role, as will be seen in the description of speaking test procedure below. The examiner who does not meet the normal requirements is forced to depend heavily on the native-speaking interviewer and on experience in testing other languages.

SPEAKING TEST: PROCEDURE

The usual speaking test is conducted by the interviewer, with the examiner observing and taking notes. To the greatest extent possible the interview appears as relaxed, normal conversation in which the examiner is a mostly silent but interested participant.

The test begins with simple social formulae: introductions, comments on the weather, questions like:

> "Have you just come back from overseas?"
> "Is this the first time you've taken a test here?"
> "Did we keep you waiting long?"

The examinee's success in responding to these opening utterances will determine the course of the rest of the test. Failure to answer easily or to understand some of them, even with repetition and rephrasing, puts a preliminary ceiling on the questions to be asked. The interviewer tries simply phrased questions that can be answered out of autobiographic information - family, work, and the like - or asks for street directions or poses a role-playing exercise (e.g., renting a house). Rarely, the examinee may handle these kinds of problems well enough to be led on to discussions of current events or of detailed job experience. Usually this kind of performance pegs the rating at some point below S-2.

The examinee who copes adequately with the preliminaries generally is led into natural conversation on autobiographical and professional topics. The experienced interviewer will simultaneously attempt to elicit the grammatical features that need to be checked. As the questions increase in complexity and detail, the examinee's limitations in vocabulary and structure normally become apparent quite rapidly. (A well-trained team usually can narrow the examinee's grade to one of two ratings within the first five or ten minutes; they spend the rest of the interview collecting data to verify their preliminary conclusions and make a final decision.)

If the examinee successfully avoids certain grammatical features, or if the opportunity to use them does not arise, or if comprehension or fluency is difficult to assess, the testers may use an interpreting situation[1] appropriate to the examinee's apparent level of proficiency. In languages in which testing is relatively infrequent or in which either the interviewer or the examiner has difficulty in spontaneous role-playing, a set of bi-lingual dialogs[1] is often prepared and written down for this purpose. If the situation is brief and plausible and the interchange yields a sufficient amount of linguistic information, this technique is a valuable supplement.

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[1] See also page 111 and following.

A third element of the speaking test, again an optional one, involves instructions or messages which are written in English, given to the examinee to be conveyed to the native speaker, (e.g., "Tell your landlord that the ceiling in the living room is cracked and leaking and the sofa and rug are ruined"). This kind of task is particularly useful for examinees who are highly proficient on more formal topics or who indicate a linguistic self-confidence that needs careful exploration.

In all aspects of the interview an attempt is made to probe the examinee's functional competence in the language and to make him aware of both his capacities and limitations.

The speaking test ends when the examiner and interviewer are satisfied that they have pinpointed the appropriate S-rating, usually after half to two-thirds of the allotted time for the whole test.

READING TEST: PROCEDURE

The short time available to measure reading ability forces a system which is necessarily less reliable than one would like. Nevertheless, correlations of .70 to .80 with longer, objectively scored tests have been reassuring.

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[1] See also page 112.

In each language, materials have been prepared corresponding to every level of the R-rating scale. Where the number of tests warrants it, the plus-levels are also represented and there are readings on varied topics at each level.

The examiner selects a reading at a level equal to or a little below the speaking level of the examinee. Normally the examinee studies the passage (100-200 words long) and then translates all of it or parts of it. If the translation is satisfactory, a passage at the next higher level is presented; if the translation is weak, another passage at the same level; and if it is very poor, a passage at the next lower level. The process continues until the examiner and interviewer are satisfied that they know the highest level the examinee can handle adequately.

Except at the R-1 level, at which highly simplified materials are used, the readings are taken from books, magazines, and newspapers written for the native speaker. They are graded according to complexity of syntax and difficulty of vocabulary. Constant use of the same materials enables the testers to determine the words and structures which may be appropriately or inappropriately difficult for the level to which the reading is assigned. If the reading is suitable overall to one level, the excessively obscure words may be supplied without penalty to the examinee who does not know them. If the passage is mixed in level, the examiner may assign only the parts of it that fit the level being tested out.

While materials are changed fairly frequently, new passages are always checked against old ones before they are finally ranked.

Except for fairly high frequency words, vocabulary is not weighted as heavily as insight into structure because most examinees can be expected to have ready access to a dictionary.

It should be emphasized that the elegance of the translation is irrelevant. Most examinees are unaccustomed to translating, especially oral translating, and cannot be expected to render a precise English version quickly and easily. What is sought is the ability to show an accurate understanding of the material in a reasonable amount of time. It is assumed that the examinee will be asked at times to convey the contents of such material to someone who can read only English.

SPEAKING TEST: EVALUATION

As the examinee studies the first reading selection, the examiner and the interviewer independently fill out the "Check List of Performance Factors" with which they are provided. The Check List records a profile of the examinee's relative strengths and weaknesses, but was designed principally to force each examiner to consider the five elements involved:

1.	ACCENT	foreign	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	native
2.	GRAMMAR	inaccurate	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	accurate
3.	VOCABULARY	inadequate	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	adequate
4.	FLUENCY	uneven	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	even
5.	COMPREHENSION	incomplete	__:	__	__:	__	__:	__	complete

This list was derived from an earlier one in which "Accent" was divided into "Pronunciation" and "Intonation," "Grammar" into "Morphology" and "Syntax," and "Vocabulary" into two scales with polar terms of completeness and accuracy. The simplified version reduced problems that the earlier one caused for examiners in languages of East Asia and made the procedure generally less formidable and more acceptable to all examiners.

A weighted scoring system for the Check List has been derived from a multiple correlation with the overall S-rating assigned (R = .95). Partly because the sample was based mainly on tests in Indo-European languages, partly because of a widespread initial suspicion of statistics among the staff, use of the scoring system has never been made compulsory or even urged, though the testers are required to complete the Check List. The result has been that most testers assign the S-rating on the basis of experienced judgment and compute the Check List score only in cases of doubt or disagreement. Nevertheless, the occasional verifications of the Check List profiles seem to keep testers in all languages in line with each other (in the sense that an S-2 in Japanese will have much the same profile as an S-2 in Swahili); and those who once distrusted the system now have faith in it.

To the trained tester each blank on each scale indicates a quite specific pattern of behavior. The first two scales, Accent and Grammar, obviously indicate features that can be described most concretely for each language. The last three refer to features that are easy to equate from language to language but difficult to describe except in functional terms, and probably dangerous to measure from so small a sample of speech on a scale more refined than these six-point ones.

The Check List does not apply to S-0's or S-5's, and the fact that the nine ratings from S-0+ to S-4+ must be reflected in the five six-point scales prevents an unconsidered column of checks to indicate a single level. Testers are allowed to make checks in between blanks if they want to, and those who give many tests often do.

When the mandatory testing program began in 1958, ratings were given on the basis of one-sentence definitions of each level. These definitions were written to be broad enough to cover every language but were so unspecific that standards varied from language to language and examinees often felt they were underrated. As the number of tests and types of examinees increased, it was possible to set more and more concrete criteria. For S-ratings there are now three principal sources of clarification: the official amplified definitions, which describe both the linguistic and functional characteristics of each level; a chart called "Factors in Speaking Proficiency" (Appendix B) which specifies the minimum criteria at each level for the five Check List factors, and is therefore primarily linguistic in focus; and a questionnaire called "Self-Appraisal of Speaking Proficiency" (Appendix C). This last is based almost entirely on functional skills and is designed not only to permit accurate appraisal of one's own proficiency but to give new or would-be examiners insight into the range and depth of mastery demanded at each level. These three documents provide sufficient information to enable even the most inexperienced tester (with the basic qualifications) to determine an S-rating within a point of the rating given by trained examiners after observing three or four tests, and within half a point (that is, a "plus") after observing ten or twelve.

The actual determination of the S-rating is handled differently from team to team. In some cases the examiner and interviewer vote on paper, in others one suggests a grade and the other agrees or disagrees, giving reasons if there is dissent. In some a preliminary vote is taken as the examinee studies material for the reading test, and disagreement leads to further oral testing until accord is reached. the examiner, who plays a supervisory role, must see to it that the interviewer contributes fully to the final decision. If a half-point discrepancy cannot be resolved by discussion or averaging of the computed scores from the Check List, the general rule followed is that the lower rating is given. (The rationale for this rule is that the rating is a promise of performance made by FSI to assignment officers and future supervisors. The consequences of overrating are more serious than the consequences of underrating, however disappointing the marginal decision may be to the examinee.)

READING TEST: EVALUATION

Because of the nature of the reading test, evaluation is virtually simultaneous with the translation. Once the over-difficult items in a selection are removed from consideration, it is generally true that three major vocabulary mistakes and one basic structural error are enough to make a translation totally unsatisfactory. Fewer mistakes than that will put the decision up to the examiner's discretion. Usually at least one reading at each level must be translated with only a single vocabulary error or none to be acceptable.

Because the examiner always has a native or near-native command of English and the interviewer may not have, the examiner's decision on the R-rating is always final, though the examiner should meet questions or objections from the interviewer if they exist. Normally there is no real problem.

VALIDITY

Aside from recently-developed tests (not yet standardized) in some European languages, there are no measures currently available beside those of FSI which test the full range of speaking and reading ability from beginner to native competence. The measures that exist are oriented toward the college student or literary specialist rather than the adult conducting business or profession work in a foreign language. As a consequence, the only criterion available to us has been the acceptability of the S- and R-rating definitions and their application to actual performance for both the examinees and the end-users of test results.

By this criterion it seems safe to say that the tests are valid. Almost all the Government agencies using FSI testing facilities have established language policies which depend heavily on test scores for assignment to specific positions, for promotion, and for incentive awards. The testers are made continuously aware that test ratings are commitments on the examinee's linguistic capacity to perform certain functions, and it is obvious that these commitments are being met with sufficient consistency to enable many different groups to rely on them without question.

The examinees themselves have generally accepted both procedure and rating system as valid measures of their competence. The complaints about results are now limited almost entirely to those who disregard basic grammatical features of the language or are unaware of them. Those who are both familiar with the rating criteria and aware of their own limitations, now a very great majority, not only concede the accuracy of their scores but have become increasingly competent at self-appraisal.

FSI

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

ABSOLUTE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RATINGS

The rating scales described below have been developed by the Foreign Service Institute to provide a meaningful method of characterizing the language skills of foreign service personnel of the Department of State and of other Government agencies. Unlike academic grades, which measure achievement in mastering the content of a prescribed course, the S-rating for speaking proficiency and the R-rating for reading proficiency are based on the absolute criterion of the command of an educated native speaker of the language.

The definition of each proficiency level has been worded so as to be applicable to every language; obviously the amount of time and training required to reach a certain level will vary widely from language to language, as will the specific linguistic features. Nevertheless, a person with S-3's in both French and Chinese, for example, would have approximately equal linguistic competence in the two languages.

The scales are intended to apply principally to government personnel engaged in international affairs, especially of a diplomatic, political, economic and cultural nature. For this reason heavy stress is laid at the upper levels on accuracy of structure and precision of vocabulary sufficient to be both acceptable and effective in dealings with the educated citizen of the foreign country.

As currently used, all the ratings except the S-5 and R-5 may be modified by a plus (+), indicating that proficiency substantially exceeds the minimum requirements for the level involved but falls short of those for the next higher level.

DEFINITIONS OF ABSOLUTE RATINGS

ELEMENTARY PROFICIENCY

S-1 Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. Can ask and answer questions on very familiar topics; within the scope of very limited language experience can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase; speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs; errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak the language; while topics which are "very familiar" and elementary needs vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at the S-1 level should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

R-1 Can read simplest connected written material, authentic or especially prepared for testing. In a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript, can read either representations of familiar verbal exchanges or simple language containing only the highest frequency grammatical patterns and vocabulary items. Texts may include personal and place names, street signs, shop designations and office designations.

LIMITED WORKING PROFICIENCY

S-2 Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information; can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge) and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions; accent, though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

R-2 Can read simple authentic written material in a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript on subjects within a familiar context. Can read uncomplicated but authentic prose on familiar subjects such as news items describing frequently occurring events, simple biographic information, social notices, formatted business letters and simple technical material written for the general reader. The prose is predominantly in familiar sentence patterns. Test candidates may need occasional prompting on a low frequency items.

PROFESSIONAL PROFICIENCY

S-3 Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease; comprehension is quite complete for a normal rate of speech; vocabulary is broad enough that he rarely has to grope for a word; accent may be obviously foreign; control of grammar good; errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

R-3 Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence, reports and technical material in own special field. Can grasp the essentials of articles of the above types without using a dictionary; for accurate understanding moderately frequent use of a dictionary is required. Has occasional difficulty with unusually complex structures and low-frequency idioms.

DISTINGUISHED PROFICIENCY

S-4 Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of own personal and professional experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations; errors of pronunciation and grammar quite rare; can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

R-4 Able to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs. With occasional use of a dictionary can read moderately difficult prose readily in any area directed to the general reader, and all materials in own special field including official and professional documents and correspondence; can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

NATIVE OR BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY

S-5 Speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. Has complete fluency in the language such that speech on all levels is fully accepted by educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.

FACTORS IN SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

	S-1	S-2
Pronunciation	Often unintelligible	Usually foreign but rarely unintelligible
Grammar	Accuracy limited to set expressions; almost no control of syntax; often conveys wrong information	Fair control of most basic syntactic patterns; conveys meaning accurately in simple sentences most of the time
Vocabulary	Adequate only for survival, travel, and basic courtesy needs	Adequate for simple social conversation and routine job needs
Fluency	Except for memorized expressions, every utterance requires enormous, obvious effort	Usually hesitant; often forced to silence by limitations of grammar and vocabulary
Comprehension	May require much repetition, slow rate of speech; understands only very simple, short familiar utterances	In general understands non-technical speech, but sometimes misinterprets or needs utterances re-worded. Usually cannot follow conversation between native speakers

S-3	S-4	S-5
Sometimes foreign but always intelligible		Native
Good control of most basic syntactic patterns; always conveys meaning accurately in reasonably complex sentences	Makes only occasional errors, and these show no pattern of deficiency	Control equal to that of an educated native speaker
Adequate for participation in all general conversation and for professional discussions in a special field	Professional and general vocabulary broad and precise, appropriate to every occasion	Equal to vocabulary of an educated native speaker
Rarely hesitant; always able to sustain conversation through circumlocutions	Speech on all professional matters as apparently effortless as in English; always easy to listen to	Speech at least as fluent and effortless as in English on all occasions
Understands most of what is said; can follow speeches, clear radio broadcasts, and most conversation between native speakers, but not in great detail	Can understand all educated speech in any moderately clear context; occasionally baffled by colloquialisms and regional-	Equal to that of the native speaker

SELF-APPRAISAL OF SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

(All answers must be YES to achieve at least the level of proficiency listed on the left, except for four items at the S-3 level.)

		YES	NO
S-0+	Can you use a minimum of thirty words in appropriate contexts? (i.e., not just count or recite the days of the week).	☐	☐
S-1	Can you tell someone how to get from here to the nearest hotel, restaurant, or post office?	☐	☐
	Can you ask and tell the time of day, day of the week, date?	☐	☐
	Can you order a simple meal?	☐	☐
	Can you negotiate for a hotel room or a taxi ride at a just price?	☐	☐
	Can you buy a needed item of clothing or a bus or train ticket?	☐	☐
	Can you understand and respond correctly to form questions about your nationality, marital status, occupation, date and place of birth, etc.?	☐	☐
	Can you make a social introduction and use appropriate leave-taking expressions?	☐	☐
	Can you use the language well enough to assist someone who does not know the language in coping with the situations or problems covered by the S-1 range?	☐	☐
S-1+	Can you meet all S-1 requirements and at least three of the S-2 requirements listed below?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-2	Can you describe your present or most recent job or activity in some detail?	☐	☐
	Can you give detailed information about your family, your house, the weather today?	☐	☐
	Can you take and give simple messages over the telephone?	☐	☐
	Can you hire an employee, or arrange for special services (taking care of details such as salary, qualifications, hours, specific duties)?	☐	☐
	Can you give a brief autobiography and tell of immediate plans and hopes?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the geography of the United States or a familiar location?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the basic structure of the U.S. Government or of the U.S. educational system?	☐	☐
	Can you describe the purpose or function of the organization you represent?	☐	☐
	Do you feel confident that you understand what native speakers want to tell you on topics like those mentioned above and that they understand you (linguistically) at least 80% of the time?	☐	☐
	Can you use the language well enough to assist someone else who does not know the language in coping with the situations or problems covered by the S-2 range?	☐	☐
S-2+	Can you meet all S-2 requirements and at least three of these S-3 requirements?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-3	(Answers should be No)		
	Are there grammatical features of the language which you try to avoid?	☐	☐
	Do you sometimes find yourself in the middle of a sentence you cannot finish because of linguistic limitations (grammar or vocabulary)?	☐	☐
	Do you find it difficult to follow and contribute to a conversation among native speakers who try to include you in their talk?	☐	☐
	Are you afraid that you will misunderstand information given to you over the telephone?	☐	☐
	(Answers should be YES)		
	Can you speak to a group of educated native speakers on a professional subject and be sure you are communicating what you want to, without obviously amusing or irritating them linguistically?	☐	☐
	Can you listen, take notes, and summarize accurately a speech or an informal discussion on your area of special interests, heard on the radio or over a public address system?	☐	☐
	Can you (on a social occasion) defend U.S. Attitudes toward culture, race relations, or foreign aid from attack by an anti-American student or politician?	☐	☐
	Can you cope with such trying linguistic situations as broken-down plumbing, an undeserved traffic ticket, a serious social or diplomatic blunder made by you or a colleague?	☐	☐
	Can you follow connected discourse on a non-technical subject, e.g., a panel discussion on the status of women?	☐	☐
	Can you serve as an informal interpreter on subjects in the S-3 range?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-3	Do you feel that you have a professional command (rather than just a practical one) of the language?	☐	☐
S-3+	Can you meet all S-3 requirements and at least three of these S-4 requirements?	☐	☐
S-4	In professional discussions, is your vocabulary always extensive and precise enough to enable you to convey your exact meaning?	☐	☐
	Are you able to alter your speech deliberately, depending upon whether you are talking to university professors, close friends, employees, etc.?	☐	☐
	Can you serve as an informal interpreter for a U.S. senator or cabinet official on all diplomatic and social functions?	☐	☐
	Do you practically never make a grammatical mistake?	☐	☐
	Do you think you can carry out any job assignment as effectively in the language as in English?	☐	☐
S-4+	In discussions on all subjects, is your vocabulary always extensive and precise enough to enable you to convey your exact meaning?	☐	☐
S-5	Do native speakers react to you as they do to each other?	☐	☐
	Do you sometimes feel more at home in the language than in English?	☐	☐

		YES	NO
S-5	Can you do mental arithmetic in the language without slowing down?	☐	☐
	Is your vocabulary at least as extensive and precise as in English?	☐	☐
	Do you consider yourself a native speaker of the language?	☐	☐

FSI LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

NATURE OF THE TEST

A test normally lasts half an hour; the time is evenly divided between a speaking test and a reading test. The testers are a certified language examiner and an interviewer who is a native speaker of the language involved.

The Speaking Test primarily consists of a conversation with the interviewer on a variety of topics, both social and professional. It may also comprise imaginary situations (such as renting an apartment) and interpreting problems.

The Reading Test requires oral translation into English of passages of varying levels of difficulty. The examinee may be asked either to read the passages aloud or simply to study them before translating.

BASES FOR RATING

Speaking. The testers consider five main aspects of performance, here listed in order of their importance: control of grammatical structure, completeness of comprehension, breadth and precision of vocabulary, fluency (or effortlessness of speech), and accuracy of pronunciation and intonation.

Reading. While an elegant translation makes an excellent impression, the testers are most interested in a close translation into decent English which shows the examinee's accurate, detailed understanding of the material and the structure exemplified.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXAMINEES

1. Answer questions as fully as possible; help us to get the largest sample of your speech that we can. We do not want brief, concise answers; we infinitely prefer loquacity to profundity.

2. On the other hand, try to speak accurately; don't sacrifice grammar for speed.

3. Don't be a perfectionist in translation if it takes you a long time to think of just the right word. If you can show by paraphrase that you clearly understand the meaning, you will be given credit. Make intelligent guesses if you like.

ASSIGNMENT OF + RATINGS

At the request of a number of examiners and interviewers, I have attempted to formulate criteria for assignment of the + ratings; that is, those which fall between those ratings for which we have official definitions. These criteria, given below, are not to be considered as official definitions, but as guidelines to help you decide those awkward cases that do not fall neatly into any defined category.

S-1+ Exceeds S-1 primarily in vocabulary, and is thus able to meet more complex travel and courtesy requirements. Normally grammar is so weak that the candidate cannot cope with social conversation, frequently saying unintended things (e.g., regularly confusing person, number, and tense in verbs). Pronunciation and comprehension are generally poor. Fluency may vary, but even quite voluble speech cannot compensate for all the other serious weaknesses.

S-2+ Exceeds S-2 primarily in fluency and in either grammar or vocabulary. Blatant deficiencies in one of these latter factors or general weaknesses in both usually prevent assignment of an S-3 rating. If a candidate is an S-3+ in vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, and if grammatical errors do not interfere with understanding, the rating should be S-3, not S-2+.

S-3+ Exceeds an S-3 primarily in vocabulary and in fluency or grammar. The kind of hesitancy which indicates uncertainty or effort in speech will normally prevent assignment of an S-4, though the candidate's native language mannerisms should be checked in doubtful cases. Frequent grammatical errors must also limit the rating to an S-3+, no matter how excellent the pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

S-4+ Should be considered as just short of an S-5. Examiners should always be prepared to justify the awarding of an S-4+ rather than an S-5 by citing specific weaknesses. Reminder: native-born and educated Americans can conceivably attain S-5. Performance in the test, not biographical information given, is what determines assignment of a rating.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS
ON
FSI ORAL TESTING PROCEDURE

The S-rating is a measure, not of knowledge about the language, but rather what the examinee can get done through the language and how respectably. The most important criterion in determination of a rating is therefore the range of situations that an examinee can be expected to handle efficiently in the language. Some people are able to make a little language go a long way; others with a broader range of knowledge or skill may make less effective use of their resources for communication. There must be rewards for effective use of resources, for skill in circumlocution and evasion of uncontrolled structures as well for precise, easy control of vocabulary and grammar.

A test given under a rating procedure which is as non-mechanical and as flexible as FSI's has two unquestionable characteristics:

1) Content validity, in that it bases the measure of conversational ability on an actual demonstration of it.
2) Consistency of format from examiner to examiner and from language to language.

Speaking proficiency must be rated on the basis of extended speech in a natural context, with the verbal tasks assigned clearly pertinent to living and working abroad. Thus, for example, role-playing is pertinent with the examinee requesting the help of a real estate agent in renting a house, seeking information from a visa applicant or explaining a U.S. policy position. On the other hand, substantive questions about literature, for example, or multiple choice written tests on grammar or vocabulary would have no place in determining an S-rating.

While examiners have always been allowed considerable independent judgment on the appropriate content of a test, it is essential that they agree on the specific features of speaking performance for which an examinee is rewarded or penalized. Especially in languages in which there are several examiners no examiner should be known for making unique demands (e.g. translation of poetry, use of regionalisms, etc.). Listed below are permissible techniques for eliciting information about speaking proficiency aside from the autobiographical conversation that is a part of every test.

Pronunciation

No special attention needs to be given to this feature; all necessary information occurs in conversation.

Grammar

Elicit as many features as possible through natural conversation. Use of a checklist of grammar points will enable you to keep track of features which are controlled or uncontrolled and those not yet elicited.

Try to elicit all other grammatical features through role playing (e.g. test imperatives by getting something repaired or test question patterns by having the candidate seek information about transportation costs and schedules) or interpreter situations in which you require rather precise translation.

Playing games with the language like classroom drills and out-of-context translations from English should be techniques used only as a last resort, since they are artificial and lack spontaneity.

Vocabulary

At the lower end of the scale (S-2 and below) the examinee's limits of practical and professional vocabulary are easily established if the testers make a point of going beyond casual conversation to specific tasks related to the definitions (e.g. buying a bus ticket, describing symptoms of illness to a doctor).

At the upper levels professional vocabulary is most easily elicited in conversation, general vocabulary through detailed problem solving (having a kitchen remodeled, describing repairs to be made on a car) and descriptions or definitions of everyday objects or behavior (describing a man's shoe, the rules of a game, the way to drive on snow and ice, the way to wrap a package for mailing).

It is important to remember that many, if not most, educated native speakers are not language-conscious and may not have in their active vocabulary words and expressions that a language specialist would take for granted, especially when asked for them out of context in English.

An examinee must be judged on ability to talk with ease and exactness rather than on talent for producing equivalents for English phrases. This means that circumlocutions are satisfactory substitutes for the 'mot juste.' (Passive vocabulary should be rated on the comprehension scale of the Check List.)[1]

Fluency

No special procedures are needed to measure fluency, but an examinee who seems to answer an S-2 level question comfortably must be challenged with a question at the S-3 level.

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[1] See page 32.

It is easy to over-rate fluency on responses to simple questions. (Contrariwise, a slow response to a very difficult question should be appraised in the light of the effort a native speaker would have to make in order to answer).

The main requirement for assessing fluency is providing the opportunity for the examinee to reply to several questions with answers of some length.

Comprehension

This feature is the one least adequately tested in the usual FSI test. If the interviewer has no special talent for for asking questions with elaborate syntax and low-frequency vocabulary, a purely conversational test may make no more demand for comprehension from an S-5 than from an S-2.

While it is permissible to play tapes of short news broadcasts or radio dialogues to an examinee, it is frequently impossible or at least difficult to do so, either for lack of time or lack of a tape- recorder. It may be wise to have brief newspaper clippings of various levels of difficulty for the interviewer to read aloud, with questions in English or the target language that primarily test comprehension of the difficult parts. (Testing of memory must be avoided.)

At the lower levels the examinee may be given instructions or information which require action. At all levels the interpreting situation, if well-planned, provides the surest check of comprehension.

Proverbial and idiomatic expressions understood by all educated native speakers (like "sour grapes" or "the pot calling the kettle black" in English) are legitimate items for an S-4 or better to be tested on, but knowledge of any particular proverb, idiom or vocabulary item is not a determining factor at any level. Regionalisms, obsolescent colloquialisms, or very low frequency words should be avoided.

Sparing use of abrupt changes of subject is helpful in testing comprehension without contextual clues. It is, however, a device which probably should not be used more than two or three times in a test; more frequent use may give the impression of incoherence.

FSI

FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY CHECK LIST - TESTING UNIT

NAME ______________________________ DATE ________________

AGENCY ____________________________ TIME ________________

LANGUAGE ________________

1.	ACCENT	foreign	__ : __	__ : __	__ : __	native
2.	GRAMMAR	inaccurate	__ : __	__ : __	__ : __	accurate
3.	VOCABULARY	inadequate	__ : __	__ : __	__ : __	adequate
4.	FLUENCY	uneven	__ : __	__ : __	__ : __	even
5.	COMPREHENSION	incomplete	__ : __	__ : __	__ : __	complete

Absolute Rating: S-________ R-________

EXAMINER ______________________________

INTERVIEWER ______________________________

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USE OF THE CHECK LIST

The purpose of the Check List is to provide a record of your evaluation of certain aspects of an individual's spoken language proficiency.

On the Check List you will find listed a series of Factors: Accent, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. You are to rate the individual's performance by placing a check-mark on the scale beside each factor.

We will use the factor "Accent" as an example of how to use the scales.

If you feel that an individual's accent is very closely related to one end of the scale (i.e. is extremely foreign, or extremely native), place a check-mark as follows:

foreign X : ___ ___ : ___ ___ : ___ native
or
foreign ___ : ___ ___ : ___ ___ : X native

If you feel that the accent is only slightly related to one end of the scale or the other (i.e. is quite foreign, or quite native), place your check-mark as follows:

foreign ___ : X ___ : ___ ___ : ___ native
or
foreign ___ : ___ ___ : ___ X : ___ native

If you feel that the accent is only slightly related to one end of the scale as opposed to the other (i.e. is more foreign than native, or more native than foreign) then place your check-mark as follows:

foreign ___: ___ _X_: ___ ___: ___ native

or

foreign ___: ___ ___: _X_ ___: ___ native

As an aid to accuracy and uniformity in rating, each of the factors is explained below:

1. ACCENT

Consider pronunciation of individual sounds (consonants and vowels), as well as pitch and stress.

2. GRAMMAR

Consider individual words and arrangements of words for grammatical accuracy.

3. VOCABULARY

Consider adequacy of vocabulary (both sufficiency and accuracy) for the topics discussed.

4. FLUENCY

Consider general smoothness or evenness of performance.

5. COMPREHENSION

Consider both completeness and speed of understanding.

These factors are not necessarily inter-related; therefore you should not expect that an individual will necessarily receive the same rating on all the factors.

Consider each factor separately and in the order listed.

Numerical Rating Procedure

Instructions: For all of the five language areas (Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension), choose the Proficiency Descriptions--from 1 to 6-- which best represent the competence of the student. Then, in the Weighting Table, find the number corresponding to each of the five descriptions* and add all five numbers. Then determine on the Conversion Table the rating level within which the total score falls. Please bear in mind that this numerical procedure is intended only to supplement the official verbal descriptions and should not be used by itself to determine a rating.

Proficiency Descriptions

Accent

1. Pronunciation frequently unintelligible.
2. Frequent gross errors and a very heavy accent make understanding difficult, require frequent repetition.
3. "Foreign accent" requires concentrated listening, and mispronunciations lead to occasional misunderstanding and apparent errors in grammar or vocabulary.
4. Marked "foreign accent" and occasional mispronunciations which do not interfere with understanding.
5. No conspicuous mispronunciations, but would not be taken for a native speaker.
6. Native pronunciation, with no trace of "foreign accent."

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*After some practice with this procedure, you may in some cases want to give a score that is "in-between" two of the descriptions. For example, if you feel the student's competence in Grammar is about midway between description 3 ("Frequent errors showing..." and description 4 ("Occasional errors showing..." you might give a weighted score of 21 for Grammar, rather than 18 or 24.

Grammar

1. Grammar almost entirely inaccurate except in stock phrases.
2. Constant errors showing control of very few major patterns and frequently preventing communication.
3. Frequent errors showing some major patterns uncontrolled and causing occasional irritation and misunderstanding.
4. Occasional errors showing imperfect control of some patterns but no weakness that causes misunderstanding.
5. Few errors, with no patterns of failure.
6. No more than two errors during the interview.

Vocabulary

1. Vocabulary inadequate for even the simplest conversation.
2. Vocabulary limited to basic personal and survival areas (time, food, transportation, family, etc.)
3. Choice of words sometimes inaccurate, limitations of vocabulary prevent discussion of some common professional and social topics.
4. Professional vocabulary adequate to discuss special interests; general vocabulary permits discussion of any non-technical subject with some circumlocutions.
5. Professional vocabulary broad and precise; general vocabulary adequate to cope with complex practical problems and varied social situations.
6. Vocabulary apparently as accurate and extensive as that of an educated native speaker.

Fluency

1. Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
2. Speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences.

3. Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted.
4. Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and groping for words.
5. Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptibly non-native in speech and evenness.
6. Speech on all professional and general topics as effortless and smooth as a native speaker's.

Comprehension

1. Understands too little for the simplest type of conversation.

2. Understands only slow, very simple speech on common social and touristic topics; requires constant repetition and rephrasing.

3. Understands careful, somewhat simplified speech when engaged in a dialogue, but may require considerable repetition and rephrasing.

4. Understands quite well normal educated speech when engaged in a dialogue, but requires occasional repetition or rephrasing.

5. Understands everything in normal educated conversation except for very colloquial or low-frequency items, or exceptionally rapid or slurred speech.

6. Understands everything in both formal and colloquial speech to be expected of an educated native speaker.

USING THE CHECK-LIST TO DETERMINE S-RATINGS

WEIGHTING TABLE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	(A)
Accent	0	1	2	2	3	4	______
Grammar	6	12	18	24	30	36	______
Vocabulary	4	8	12	16	20	24	______
Fluency	2	4	6	8	10	12	______
Comprehension	4	8	12	15	19	23	______
							______
						Total	______

Procedure: Place in Column (A) of the Weighting Table the credits to be given for each scale on the Check List. For example, a check mark in position 3 on the "Accent" scale is given a credit of 2. Add the credits to find the total score. The final S-rating is to be equated with the total score by the Conversion Table.

CONVERSION TABLE

Score	Rating	Score	Rating	Score	Rating
16-25	S-0+	43-52	S-2	73-82	S-3+
26-32	S-1	53-62	S-2+	83-92	S-4
33-42	S-1+	63-72	S-3	93-99	S-4+

If both examiner and interviewer are certified to rate and their respective total scores yield different S-ratings, an average of their total scores should be used to determine the final rating.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR AN ORAL TEST

Introductions and Greetings

Sample Opening Questions:
- How did you get to FSI?
- Have you been in this building before?
- Did you have difficulty finding this office?

Topics useful for all levels:

- Training and experience with the language
- Most recent assignment abroad
  - Type of work and responsibilities
  - Problems on the job
  - Problems of the country, its government, economy, etc.
  - Living conditions, travel, recreation
- Earlier assignments (as above)
- Next assignment
- People and events in the news (descriptions, not opinions)

Topics for S-0+ to S-2+

- Family and House
- Date and Time
- Weather
- Giving Directions
- Situations:
  - Getting a hotel room
  - Buying a train ticket
  - Changing money
  - Taking a taxi

Topics for S-2 to S-4

- Explanation of American terms and culture (e.g. "red tape," "Buy American" act, U.S. system of education)
- Reasons for career choice
- Visa interview or other job situations

Topics for S-3+ to S-5

- International politics
- Cultural differences
- Dictation of letter on assigned topic
- Translation from English

QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINERS

1. Are the first questions natural, friendly, easy to understand?

2. Are questions requiring only short answers avoided?

3. Are the topics varied? Is transition from one topic to another natural? Is the examinee given a chance to expand on one topic before another is introduced?

4. Are there too many vague questions? (e.g. "What do you think of the situation in the Middle East?")

5. Is the examinee forced to express opinions about U.S. Government policy? (e.g. "If you were President, what would you do about Human Rights?") "How did you like the State-of-the-Union Message?")

6. Are the questions appropriate for the ability of the examinee? Is the S-2 asked easy enough questions? Is the S-4 asked hard enough questions? (Consider vocabulary, structure, subject matter.)

7. Is the examinee given the opportunity to talk sufficiently about the past? the future?

8. Is the examinee given the opportunity (or forced, if necessary) to use the present subjunctive (including commands)? the past subjunctive? On the other hand, are there too many subjunctive questions?

SUGGESTIONS FOR SELECTION OF READING MATERIALS FOR TESTS

R-1 a) Make up a list of common public signs containing twenty items or so of the following type:

EXIT
PUSH
STOP
POST OFFICE
REGISTERED MAIL
EXCHANGE
NO PARKING
RESTAURANT
BUS STOP
MADISON AVE.
1942 32nd St., N.W.
GENTLEMEN
etc.

b) Find in an elementary text-book (or write your own) passages designed for the beginning adult student. The vocabulary should consist only of very high-frequency items and cognates (if appropriate) and the structures should be limited to those learned by most students in the first 100-200 hours of training (excluding pronunciation drill time). Topics should be familiar and plausible. Some that have been found useful are: the geography of a region; the basic structure of government of a country; a description of routine behavior. If you write your own R-1 readings, try to avoid making them fit the content of FSI text material better than any other. If you can't, it may be fairer to count such a selection as R-1 for FSI students and R-1+ for others.

R-2 Look for selections in newspapers written for the semi-educated (if such papers exist), in schoolbooks used in the equivalent of the 8th and 9th grades and in pictorial magazines. Avoid structures considered difficult for the English-speaker and try to exclude technical or low-frequency vocabulary items. (If a passage is appropriate except for two or three words, either substitute more common words or warn the student that there are two or three unfamiliar words and if necessary give the English for them.) R-2 material should not be written especially for English-speakers, but may be sparingly edited to make it simpler. You may find good readings among the short items: jokes, announcements of coming events, letters to the editor, anecdotes, stories about people, etc.

It is usually easier to find R-2+ readings than R-2 readings. If you can decide which specific features make a passage an R-2+ rather than an R-2, you may find it better to determine an R-2 grade by default. (In such a case, however, be sure that the candidate is clearly better than an R-1+.)

R-3 By definition an R-3 can read the newspapers and will be expected to do so. If the written language is very remote from the spoken language, it may take a long time to become an R-3, but the functional skill involved must not be ignored. In some languages, if you can read a newspaper, you can read anything "pertinent to professional needs," i.e., R-3 and R-4 seem to fall together. Under such circumstances the differences between the two lie chiefly in extensiveness of vocabulary and insight into rare structures.

An R-3 should, at the very least, be able to grasp the essentials of any article that the literate native speaker understands with a quick skimming and with the aid of a dictionary should be able to decipher any sentence of a common syntactical pattern.

If readings are selected in accordance with the amplified definition of an R-3, the need for a dictionary should not be more than occasional (perhaps two or three words out of a hundred in an average news dispatch). Where the article is outside of the examinee's special area of interest, more grace should be allowed on vocabulary (e.g., a consular officer can be expected to know only the most common military terms, while a military officer is unlikely to have a wide grasp of consular vocabulary).

R-4 An R-4 is expected to be able to decipher anything that comes along — a legislative bill, a diplomatic note, a scholarly treatise, etc. If native counterparts can grasp a selection accurately with one careful reading, it is reasonable to expect the R-4 to do the same. None but the most obscure syntax should cause difficulty and vocabulary should be no limitation except in unfamiliar technical fields; should recognize all the professionally-relevant vocabulary known to the educated non-professional native.

At this level the testing problem is often that of judging the reading skill of those without sufficient educational background or experience to decode an R-4 reading. Articles selected should be sufficiently unspecialized to be useful to several different types of employees. On the whole it seems wise to stick to the definitions and be strict, although some employees are not R-4 even in English.

It is hazardous to give an R-4 on the basis of one selection at that level.

R-5 The only restrictions on an R-5 reading are that it be reasonably well written prose intelligible to any university graduate.

Effort should be made to find passages containing unusual and complex syntactical patterns and literary, colloquial, and household vocabulary of the kind known to every native speaker but to few foreigners.

No single reading is hard enough to warrant assignment of an R-5. Satisfactory translation of two readings at the R-5 level on quite different topics is necessary; successful translation of only one yields an R-4+.

ON TESTING FOR S-1+ AND S-2

A foreign language learner who has gotten beyond the S-1 level already has a control of vocabulary and structure beyond the possibility of exhaustive testing in 15 minutes. The sampling of speech must give the examinee every chance to show off the extent of control of the language without wasting time on impossibly difficult questions. The examiner without a great deal of experience in testing above the S-1 level should allow at least twenty minutes for testing someone with the potential for an S-2.

Questions and interpreter situations should be chosen to test both linguistic and functional qualifications. Thus, for example, questions which call only for present tense answers should be subordinated to those which demand control of past, future, duration, indirect discourse, etc. Comprehension must be checked by asking unsimplified questions on conversational topics at normal speed. Vocabulary must be probed without too much time spent on subjects the examinee can't handle.

The topics covered in the "Self-Appraisal Questionnaire" are neither a necessary nor sufficient inventory of what an S-2 must know; they simply indicate the kind of subjects that most S-2's can handle without much trouble, among many others.

The same topic can be presented on several levels:

Weather

0+/1 What is the weather like today?
1/1+ Tell me about the climate in your part of the country.
1+/2 What is really bad winter weather in your state like? What is a hurricane (or a tornado)? What do people do to prepare for one? Have you ever been in one? (Tell me about it)

Family and Home

0+/1 How many brothers and sisters do you have? How old are they? What do they do?

1/1+ Tell me about the place your family lives in. What rooms does it have? What does it look like outside?

1+/2 Where did you live as a child? Did you have relatives who lived near by? Who? (How often did you see them?) What was your neighborhood like? What used to happen on your birthday?

Job or Profession (e.g., teacher)

0+/1 What kind of work do you do?
What kind of work will you do in (country)?

1/1+ How did you learn to be a teacher? What did you study? What does a teacher do every day?

1+/2 What teaching materials will you use? What do you know about the school system of (country)? What percentage of children go to school? How do you think teaching there will be different from teaching in the United States?

Some appropriate and adequate response is required to get credit for the lower grade; a reasonably full and linguistically accurate response is needed for the upper one.

It is important for the examiner to pose questions which relate to the examinee's life and interests and to modify the content according to information given in responses. At the 1+/2 level there is no excuse for identical questions from examinee to examinee, which make it very difficult to establish an atmosphere of normal conversation with real communication going on. One is much more likely to get a full response to Question A then to Question B:

A. Tell me about the elementary school you went to.

B. Describe the American educational system.

At the same time the response to Question A is fully as likely to demonstrate fluency, breadth of vocabulary and control of structure. It is also more likely to provide a source for further "individualized" questions.

While every S-2 must be able to talk comfortably and in some detail about family and home territory (city, town, state), autobiography, and occupation (in addition to making use of the language for routine on-the-job purposes), the S-2 will have limited ability to cope with a number of common topics. The S-2 should not be expected to have much precise general vocabulary (e.g. parts of a car, cooking utensils, symptoms of illness) nor to wrestle with intellectually demanding problems (e.g. the powers and responsibilities of the U.S. Congress, Human Rights) but the S-2 should be able to sustain superficial social conversation for hours, without serious failure of communication.

Examples of the kind of unspecialized practical interpreting situations an S-2 might handle quite well are:

1) Describing to a policeman the circumstances of a purse-snatching and the appearance of the thief.
2) Making arrangements to rent a large hall and to have it set up for a banquet or a press conference or a workshop.
3) Helping someone through an interview or questionnaire for a job or scholarship in the United States.

Many other situations can be devised by examiners familiar with the examinee's occupational specialty and post of assignment. In any case, interpreting at this level should be reserved for problem solving and not wasted on topics covered more easily in ordinary conversation.

A useful technique at this level, is for the examiner to give the examinee written instructions in English to convey certain information in the target language to the interviewer. These instructions are usually of two types, definitions and requests. For example:

> Describe a volcano (a ferry boat, a tooth pick) so that (the interviewer) can identify what you are talking about.
>
> Tell (the interviewer): I have left my glasses on the last table on the left in the dining hall and ask her to get them for me right away.

The examinee succeeds if the interviewer is able to give the English word identifying the object described or starts to respond to the request and clearly understood the message. For this reason the object to be identified must be well within the interviewer's English vocabulary and experience, and the written instructions must be unknown to the interviewer in every case. Only items appropriate to the S-2 level must be chosen if this procedure is to yield useful information.

An S-1+ is to be given to an examinee who can do many of the things an S-2 can do in addition to meeting all the requirements for an S-1 (an S-2, of course, meets the requirements for S-1 also). Failure to earn S-2 is usually because of inadequacy of vocabulary and/or structural control to a) convey accurate information or b) sustain conversation on some S-2 topics. Even high fluency and broad vocabulary will not earn an S-2 if the grammatical errors are serious; on the other hand, perfect control of the grammar cannot compensate for a vocabulary too limited for many S-2 level topics.

ELICITATION TECHNIQUES FOR HIGHER LEVELS

Stephen P. J. Zappala

The interview test is an effective means of measuring speaking proficiency. Its appeal as a test lies in the fact that it consists of a sample of as natural a conversation as possible. Its naturalness, therefore, is important. However, 'natural' conversation does not always explore the candidate's proficiency as fully as we wish. Certain grammatical elements of French and Spanish are hard to get in a natural conversation between interviewer and candidate. For example, the candidate is likely to *answer* many questions but seldom *asks* them. Imperatives seldom occur, and likewise double pronouns (e.g. 'it to her, them to me') and formal/informal distinctions.

Sometimes a candidate turns out to be an 'artful dodger', glib enough to avoid grammatical constructions that the interviewer is trying to elicit, as in the following search for a conditional:

Interviewer: What would you do if you were President?
Candidate: I know I'll never be President, so I don't even want to discuss that as a possibility.
(or)
Interviewer: What would you have done if you had been there?
Candidate: I don't know. I wasn't there.
Interviewer: Yes, but what would you have done?
Candidate: The same thing that so-and-so did.

The process of eliciting a sufficient sample may be further complicated if no skilled interviewer is available. Sometimes the examiner is obliged to use an interviewer who is not adequately trained or is not very imaginative. Seasoned interviewers are usually adept at leading a natural conversation in directions which evoke a wide range of structures and give the candidate considerable opportunity to display the scope of his or her proficiency.

But even the most ingenious interviewer finds cases in which a natural conversation fails to reveal, on clear evidence, whether the candidate controls certain key features of the language. When this happens it is usually possible to find out by resorting to artificial techniques. (At FSI, such techniques are used occasionally when testing for S-3, in perhaps half of the tests at the S-3+ level and almost always at the S-4 and S-4+ levels.)

I Using English Stimuli

A number of techniques are available for eliciting particular grammatical constructions or lexical items using English stimuli. An obvious example is giving the candidate an English sentence containing an item that one wishes to elicit and asking for a translation into the foreign language. This technique is simple, quick and direct but there is some danger inherent in it. Some people are not used to translating. For example, a French candidate when asked to translate _He is interested in..._may come out with _*Il est interessé dans..._ even though entirely capable of saying _Il s' intéresse à..._ in a real conversation.

In order to avoid word-for-word translations, it is advisable to let the candidate know beforehand that what is asked for is a 'thought' translation, that is, a translation of the thought behind the English words rather than a translation of the words themselves. An example such as the following might be given by way of explanation:

English		French	Spanish
How do you do?	'Thought' translation:	Enchanté.	Mucho gusto.
	Nonsensical literal translation:	*Comment faites-vous?	*Cómo hace Vd?

Another danger in the sentence-translation technique lies in the amount of interference that the English sentence may induce. Foreign words and expressions may come easily to one in a conversation with a foreigner but when asked to translate something from English, the same person is sometimes stumped (even with common, everyday items) because of an obscurity created by the English words.

Dangers such as these must be taken into account in using the sentence-translation technique. If a good translation is rendered, positive credit may be awarded for it. However, if a poor translation is rendered, it is up to the examiner to determine how much the candidate may or may not have been influenced by dangers such as those mentioned here.

A. Challenging Sentences. In selecting sentences to be used for translation at the higher levels, the following criteria are recommended:

1) Sentences should contain those grammar points that are difficult for Americans to master:

(in French or Spanish) - Verb forms and verb phrases used to express the past

Prepositions

'could have, should have' constructions

complex Subjunctive constructions

verbs for 'to go' and 'to come'

(in Spanish) - *ser*, *estar* and *haber*

por and *para*

gustar in forms other than the simple *me gusta* or *le gusta*

(in French) - *en*

y

2) Sentences should be in a normal English that does not reveal the grammatical point being tested. (They may seem simple and yet there is a pitfall).

'I have been getting up for the past three days at 5:00'

(French) *Je me lève a cinq heures depuis trois jours*.

(Spanish) *Me levanto a las cinco desde hace tres días*.

3) Sentences should contain exceptions to the general rules normally found in basic grammars. (Such things are sometimes found in advanced grammars in footnotes.)

For example, many students are taught that the Imperfect corresponds to the English '...-ing' or 'used to...' constructions and that something else corresponds to a one-word past verb form in English. Thus, they are taught that:

		French	Spanish
'I was speaking' (or) 'I used to speak'	=	je parlais	hablaba
'I spoke'	=	j'ai parlé	hablé

However, sentences like the following are exceptions to the above rule.

> 'Where's Joe? - I don't know. I was talking to him for an hour just yesterday afternoon.'
>
> (or)
>
> 'When I went to France the first time I spoke no French but I began learning it in no time at all.'

Sometimes two or more difficult grammatical points may be found in one sentence, such as in the following:

> 'When he was there, I don't think they liked him.'

B. Short Articles in English. Carefully chosen short articles in English offer another useful device for eliciting particular grammatical features. For example, the following article quoting a mother on her runaway daughter contains a variety of tenses:

> "My daughter ran away from home Saturday. She had always been a good girl and had never done anything like this before. She got into trouble because she went around with a bad crowd. If she hadn't, she would never have done this sort of thing."

The candidate can be asked to translate the article into the target language. In this way, the interviewer does not have to search for ways to elicit these different tenses. They are all contained in one neat package.

It is not always necessary to ask for a complete translation to find out whether the candidate can handle the grammatical framework or lexical substance of the article. The interviewer may ask for a resume. If in the candidate's resume certain forms or constructions are avoided the examiner may then wish to point to a particular part of the article and ask, "What does this say?"

If articles are to be used in this way, the interviewer must have a large selection of them available to avoid predictability in the content of the test.

C. Vocabulary Lists. Languages have a considerable inventory of medium-frequency vocabulary known to all native speakers. One measure of the extent to which a foreigner has mastered the language is his or her range of command within this vocabulary. When testing candidates at the higher levels of proficiency it is useful to have an extensive list of such items in English from which the interviewer may select at random and ask for the counterpart in the target language. Examples include:

(parts of the body)
earlobe
eardrum
nostril
pupil (of the eye)
eyebrow
eyelash
eyelid
eyeball
cheek
cheekbone
sideburn
nape (of the neck)
Adam's apple
spine
knuckle
wrist
hip
waist
thigh
ankle

(articles of clothing)
lapel
buttonhole
lining
zipper
pocket flap
shirt cuffs
trouser cuffs
cufflinks
belt buckle

(room items)
lightswitch
bulb
socket
plug
doorknob
keyhole
lock
hinge
faucet
sink
bathtub

This technique has the advantage of eliciting a large number of vocabulary items very quickly, but there is also a risk. Some people may be influenced by the English word to the point that they cannot think of the corresponding word in the target language, even though they know it.

D. Instructions (on a card). In order to test ability to convey meaning by using only speech (no gestures), the candidate is handed a card on which are instructions in English that the candidate is to convey to the interviewer in the target language. The interviewer's carrying out the instructions or not indicates the candidate's ability or lack of ability to impart the instructions well in the target language.

For example, the candidate may be handed a card that reads as follows:

Please give this ball-point pen to the interviewer and have him/her perform the following activities with the pen. Do not use your hands; give all instructions verbally only.

(1) Hold the pen with the ball-point end facing up, between the thumb and index finger of the left hand.

(2) With the thumb and index finger of the right hand, completely unwind the bottom part of the pen.

(3) Remove the refiller and place it on the table.

(4) Remove the coil spring, turn it around and put it back on the refiller.

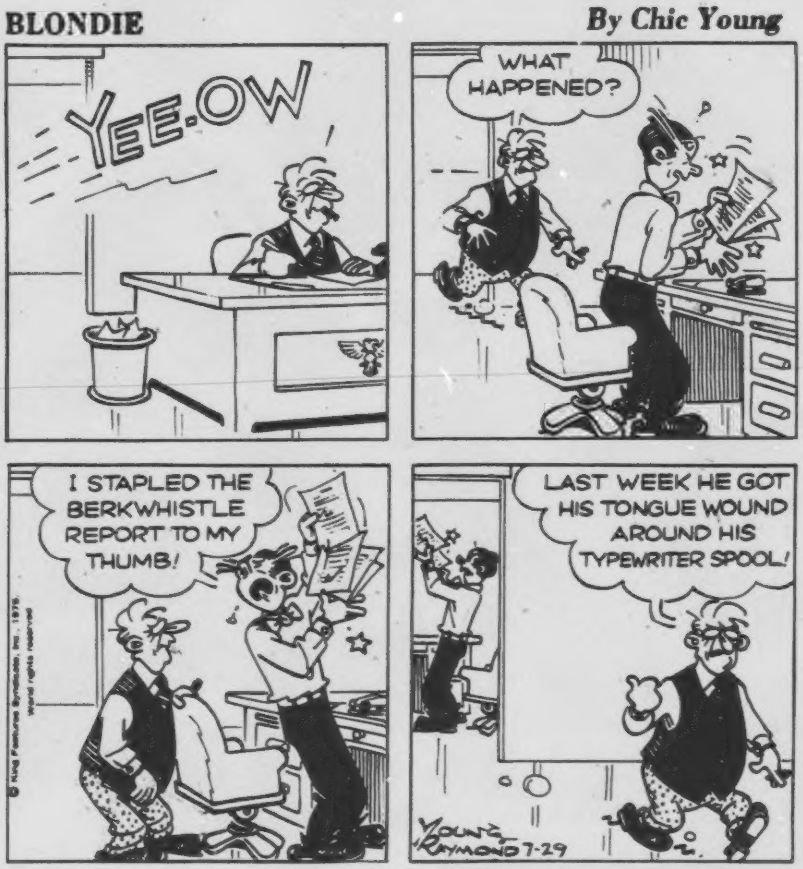
(5) Replace the refiller inside the cartridge and put the pen back together.

(6) Return the pen.

E. Situations. Situations, with or without a prepared script are very useful in forcing the candidate to express certain specific ideas in the target language. Situations are elaborated upon in another chapter entitled Interpreter Situations.

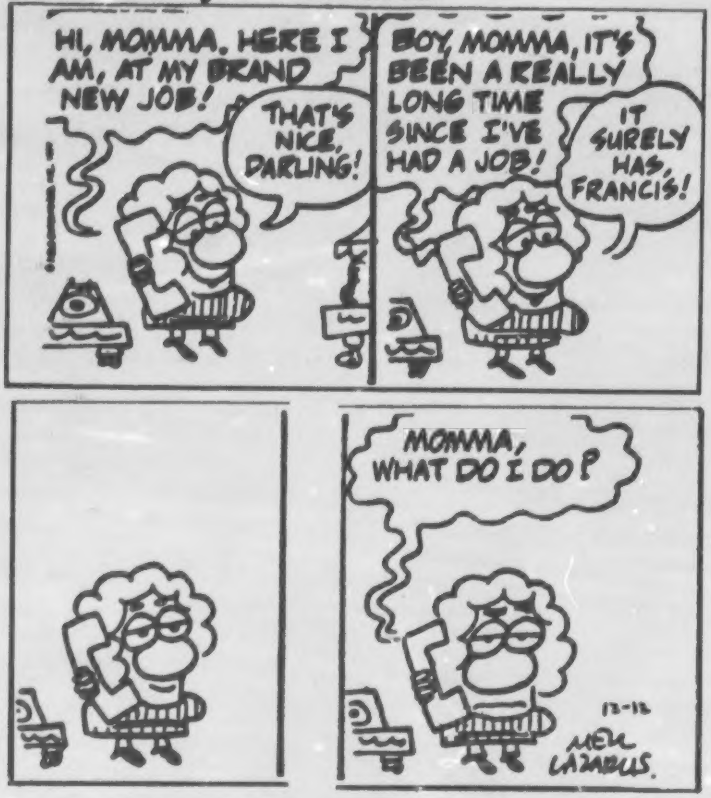
F. Cartoons. Cartoons without words or cartoons with English captions are extremely useful in eliciting grammatical constructions and specific vocabulary. As a testing technique their appeal lies in the fact that the situations presented are understandable to the average person and the English captions, if any, utilize highly colloquial English known to the average person but often not easy to translate into the target language.

Cartoons are especially useful for eliciting imperatives and formal/informal distinctions. They must be selected carefully before the test in accordance with whatever it is that one wishes to test: vocabulary, subjunctive constructions, 'if' clauses, imperatives, etc. Some of the more useful cartoons for this technique are Blondie, Momma and Cathy, although the latter is often quite wordy.


BLONDIE
By Chic Young
YEE-OW
WHAT HAPPENED?
I STAPLED THE BERKWHISTLE REPORT TO MY THUMB!
LAST WEEK HE GOT HIS TONGUE WOUND AROUND HIS TYPEWRITER SPOOL!
© King Features Syndicate, Inc. 1979 World rights reserved
YOUNG RAYMOND 7-29

Reproduced by permission

MOMMA / *by Mell Lazarus*


HI, MOMMA, HERE I AM, AT MY BRAND NEW JOB!
THAT'S NICE, DARLING!
BOY, MOMMA, IT'S BEEN A REALLY LONG TIME SINCE I'VE HAD A JOB!
IT SURELY HAS, FRANCIS!
MOMMA, WHAT DO I DO?
12-12
MELL LAZARUS

Courtesy of Mell Lazarus and Field Newspaper Syndicate.

It is important in this technique that the candidate be given a cartoon and told to 'describe the scene and the situation' so that the interviewer (who does not see the cartoon) will understand the cartoon. If the cartoon has English captions, most candidates do tend to translate the words, which is perfectly permissible, provided what they say ends up 'describing the situation.' If an important construction or vocabulary item is avoided, the examiner may point to a particular caption and ask, 'What does this say?' At the end of the description, the interviewer may ask the candidate questions to clarify anything that was not clear.

II Using Target Language Stimuli

A. Re-Phrasing. In order to elicit a particular construction, a situation (planned in advance) is portrayed in the target language by the interviewer and examiner, and the candidate is asked to re-phrase.

Example (to elicit the Present Subjunctive in French or Spanish after 'to want'):

Interviewer to examiner:	Please come to my office at 2:00.
Examiner to candidate:	What does (s)he want?
Candidate:	(S)he wants you to go to his/her office at 2:00.

Grammatical exercises like this can be repeated with different verbs, thus giving more than one example.

Example (to see if the candidate knows whether to use the subjunctive or the indicative in certain clauses):

Examiner: When Mary finished writing the letter, her boss had been gone for five minutes.

Examiner asks the candidate the following questions:

When did the boss leave?

When did Mary finish writing the letters?

Example (to elicit the double clitic pronouns):

Examiner holds up a pencil and asks the candidate the following questions:

What is this?
What would you ask me if you wanted this pencil?

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Examiner gives the candidate the pencil and asks:

What did I just do?
Who gave it to you?
Did (s)he give it to you?
When did I give it to you?
Why did I give it to you?
Pass the pencil to (the interviewer) .
What did you just do?
Did you give it to me?
When did you give it to him/her?
Why did you do it?
What did I want from you?

B. Comprehension as a Test of Vocabulary. We have noted above that languages have many medium-frequency vocabulary items known to all native speakers. One means of getting an estimate on the candidate's range of command in this vocabulary is to use an occasional medium-frequency word or expression in the interview conversation, expressions which the native speaker might ordinarily avoid in talking with a foreigner. The expert interviewer can test comprehension by artfully inserting them in sentences with contexts which do not reveal their meaning. For example, here are some questions with such items:

(French) Est-ce que c'est un conte grivois?
'improper'

Est-ce qu'ils ont resquillé?
'come without being invited'

(Spanish) Hay fuerzas castrenses en ese país?
'military'

Se sintieron a sus anchas?
'at ease'

III Using Visual Stimuli

In addition to English and target language cues, it should be noted that it is also possible to elicit vocabulary items by the use of visual aids: pictures taken from magazines or actual objects in the room (e.g. paintings, lightswitch, doorknob, one's clothing).

Recapitulation

What is being tested	Technique
Accent:	
Phonology	All
Stress and intonation	All elicit sentences-type responses.
Grammar:	
Morphology	I.A, I.B, I.D, I.E, I.F, IIA
Syntax	I.A, I.B, I.D, I.E, I.F
Vocabulary	I.A, I.B, I.C, I.D, I.E, I.F, III
Fluency	All that elicit sentence-type responses
Comprehension	I.E, II.A, II.C

METHODE A SUIVRE

A L'INTENTION DES EXAMINATEURS

L'examen oral de l'FSI n'a pas pour but de faire l'inventaire des connaissances passives du candidat, mais plutôt d'évaluer son degré de communication et la manière dont il s'exprime. Pour déterminer la note que l'on doit donner à un candidat, il importe surtout de mesurer la gamme des situations qui correspondent à son niveau d'expression. On doit considérer comment il utilise ses connaissances ainsi que son habileté à manipuler des périphrases pour formuler ses idées ou éviter les structures qu'il ne maîtrise pas, ainsi que la précision et la facilité avec lesquelles il manie le vocabulaire et la grammaire. Etant donné le caractère non automatique et la flexibilité des tests de l'FSI, ceux-ci possèdent deux caractéristiques absolues:

1) Ils permettent de mesurer la capacité d'expression du candidat dans une situation naturelle.
2) Ils présentent un certain degré d'uniformité quant aux notes et à l'épreuve même, quel que soit l'examinateur et quelle que soit la langue.

On ne doit déterminer la note qu'après avoir fait parler le candidat pendant un certain temps et dans un contexte naturel, en orientant la conversation sur des sujets en rapport avec les conditions de vie et de travail à l'étranger. On peut par exemple créer des situations dans lesquelles le canditat doit soit expliquer à un agent immobilier quelle sorte de maison il voudrait louer, soit interviewer une personne désirant un visa soit encore expliquer la politique américaine dans une situation donnée. D'autre part, toute question sur les connaissances littéraires, historiques ou autres, pas plus que les tests à choix multiple sur la grammaire ou le vocabulaire ne devraient être utilisés en vue de déterminer la note.

Bien qu'on ait toujours accordé aux examinateurs une certaine indépendance pour juger du contenu d'un test, il est essentiel qu'ils se mettent d'accord sur les principes selon lesquels ils jugeront la façon dont s'exprime le candidat et dont dépendra sa note. Aucun examinateur ne devrait exiger de la part d'un candidat des connaissances trop techniques (traduction de poésie, utilisation de termes régionaux, etc...) et ceci surtout dans les langues pour lesquelles il y a plusieurs examinateurs. Vous trouverez ci-dessous une liste de techniques qui peuvent permettre d'obtenir des indications sur la façon de parler du candidat. Nous ne traitons pas ici de la conversation autobiographique qui fait partie de tout test. (Toute suggestion concernant les méthodes sera la bienvenue.)

Prononciation

Ce facteur ne demande pas d'attention speciale puisqu'il sera mis naturellement en evidence dans la conversation.

Grammaire

Dans la mesure du possible, essayer d'obtenir les indications désirées dans la conversation. Dresser à l'avance une liste des points de grammaire que l'on pourra cocher afin de tenir le compte de ceux qui sont suffisamment ou insuffisamment maîtrisés ainsi que de ceux que l'on n'aura pas encore obtenus dans la conversation. Essayer d'obtenir d'autres constructions grammaticales en faisant jouer un rôle au candidat, (par exemple pour l'impératif, voir s'il peut demander à quelqu'un de réparer quelque chose; pour la forme interrogative, voir s'il est capable de se renseigner sur les moyens de transport, les prix ou les horaires) ou en utilisant une situation d'interprète qui exigera une traduction assez précise.

On ne devrait recourir qu'en dernier ressort aux procédés artificiels consistant à donner des exercices comme ceux que l'on fait en classe et des thèmes (traduction de l'anglais) hors de contexte. De tels procédés sont à rejeter parce qu'ils manquent de naturel et de spontanéité.

Vocabulaire

Aux niveaux les plus bas (S-2 et au dessous) on peut délimiter l'étendue du vocabulaire pratique et professionnel du candidat en passant délibérément de banalités à une conversation dirigée (comment demander un ticket d'autobus, embaucher une bonne ou décrire les symptômes d'une maladie à un médecin).

Aux niveaux les plus élevés, c'est dans la conversation que l'on peut obtenir le plus facilement le vocabulaire relatif à la profession du candidat alors que pour obtenir le vocabulaire d'ordre général on peut donner des problèmes à résoudre en détail (par exemple, faire faire des transformations dans la cuisine ou décrire des réparations à faire sur une voiture) ou bien faire décrire ou définir des objets connus ou certaines habitudes (par exemple, décrire une chaussure, les règles d'un jeu, la façon de conduire sur la neige ou sur le verglas, ou la façon d'emballer un paquet que l'on va mettre à la poste).

Il est important de se rappeler que beaucoup, sinon la plupart, des gens éduqués ne considèrent pas comme faisant essentiellement partie de leur vocabulaire actif des mots et des expressions qui viendraient naturellement à l'esprit d'une personne spécialisée dans un domaine particulier.

Il faut juger un candidat sur la facilité et l'exactitude avec lesquelles il s'exprime plutôt que sur son habileté à trouver des équivalents aux locutions anglaises. En d'autres termes, à la place du 'mot juste' une périphrase serait acceptable. (Le vocabulaire passif devrait être jugé sur la compréhension).

Débit

Point n'est besoin de procédés spéciaux pour évaluer le débit, mais si un candidat répond facilement à une question du niveau S-2, il faudrait le pousser à répondre à une question du niveau S-3. Il est facile de surestimer le débit quand le candidat ne répond qu'à des questions simples. D'autre part, une réponse lente à une question très difficile, devrait être jugée en tenant compte de la difficulté que cette question présenterait à une personne s'exprimant dans sa langue maternelle. Pour évaluer le débit du candidat, il importe surtout de lui donner l'occasion de répondre assez longuement à plusieurs questions.

Compréhension

Au cours d'un examen de l'FSI, la façon dont on juge la compréhension est souvent ce qu'il y a de moins adéquat. Si l'examinateur n'a pas l'art d'employer une syntaxe compliquée et un vocabulaire peu usuel en formulant ses questions, l'épreuve fondée uniquement sur la conversation pourrait ne pas exiger d'un candidat de niveau S-5 une meilleure compréhension que celle d'un candidat de niveau S-2.

Bien qu'il soit acceptable de faire écouter au candidat des bandes magnétiques sur lesquelles sont enregistrés des nouvelles ou des dialogues radiodiffusés de courte durée, ceci est souvent impossible ou tout au moins difficile en raison du temps limité, ou de l'absence de magnétophone. Il serait peut-être bon de découper au préalable de courts articles de journaux représentant différents niveaux que l'examinateur pourrait lire à voix haute. Il poserait ensuite des questions en anglais ou dans la langue que l'on évalue, questions dont l'objectif principal serait de déterminer la compréhension des passages difficiles. (Les épreuves de mémoire sont à éviter).

Aux niveaux les plus bas, on pourrait donner au candidat des instructions ou des renseignements et juger de sa compréhension en fonction de ses réactions. En fait, quel que soit le niveau, une situation d'interprète appropriée offre le meilleur moyen d'évaluer la compréhension.

Au niveau S-4 et au-dessus, on peut recourir à des proverbes et à des idiotismes que comprennent tous les gens éduqués, (tels que 'les raisins sont trop verts' ou 'à bon entendeur salut'). Mais quel que soit le niveau du candidat, il ne faut pas baser sa décision sur le fait qu'il connaisse un certain proverbe, idiotisme ou vocable. Les expressions régionales, les tournures populaires désuètes ou les mots peu usités sont à éviter.

Il pourrait être utile de recourir de temps en temps, sans en abuser, à de brusques changements de sujet de conversation pour vérifier la compréhension hors de contexte.

Mais il vaudrait sans doute mieux ne pas recourir à ce moyen plus de deux ou trois fois au cours d'une épreuve si on ne veut pas courir le risque de donner l'impression d'incohérence.

GRAMMATICAL BENCHMARKS FOR FRENCH

In formal programs of French instruction, grammatical features tend to be mastered in the order shown below. For some people these groups of structures indicate the degree of control of the language. Grammatical criteria may be especially useful in end-of-training tests, where the examinee is unlikely to have compensatory skills to make up for grammatical weaknesses. If a speaker with practical experience using French abroad has high fluency, broad vocabulary, and unusually good comprehension, some lack of grammatical control is allowed, but most features required for each level must be mastered.

Essential for Communication

Present tense: avoir, être, aller, and regular verbs
Future expressed by aller + infinitive
Passé composé understood but not in use
Past concept conveyed somehow (usually by adverbs)
Yes-no questions and questions with question words
Negative statements and questions with present tense
De/à + definite article
Demonstratives
Gender concept

Important for Communication

All verbs: present, passé composé, imperfect, imperative
Distinction between passé composé and imperfect (understood)
Regular verbs: future

Direct and indirect object pronouns, y and en: correctly selected and placed but not necessarily in order when co-occurring

Use of qui and que

Prepositions, especially à and de

Possessive adjectives

Definite vs indefinite article

Chez

Necessary for More Precise Communication

All spoken tenses of all verbs: forms and usage

Concordance of tenses

Passé composé vs imperfect (Mastered)

Tu forms

All relative, demonstrative, possessive, interrogative pronouns:

All object pronouns, y, en in co-occurrence

Negative pronouns and adverbs in co-occurrence

Agreement of gender and number: adjectives, past participle

Prepositions

Tout, tous, etc.

C'est vs il est

ON ELICITING FEATURES OF FRENCH

by Catherine Hanna

Generally the interviewer uses a normal, relaxed conversation, bearing in mind the structural points which will present themselves naturally. There is no specific strategy, no planned "line of attack". It is simply a question of taking advantage of the openings, as they occur. With a little experience, the interviewer sees opportunities and makes the most of them. There is nothing Machiavellian. When certain structures do not appear, either because the candidate is not aware of them or systematically avoids them, it is necessary to pry further. The following excerpts may illustrate some of these instances. In the answers quoted below we have not attempted to reflect faulty pronunciation except where meaning is obscured (e.g. by use of an English word).

* * * * *

Searching for a past tense at level S-1:

Q: Votre femme est heureuse d'aller en Tunisie?

A: ....?

Q: Est-ce qu'elle a déjà habité en Afrique?

A: ....?

Q: Avez-vous habité en Afrique?

A: Oui, nous habitons en Ethiopie.

Q: Quand?

A: Avant, pendant deux ans.

Q: En quelle année?

A: 62 à 64

Q: Il y avait beaucoup de programmes d'aide économique en Ethiopie?

A: Oui... je travaille seulement... programme de logement.

Q: Vous avez fait construire de nouvelles habitations?

A: Non, mais nous garantissons les prix pour le financement des logements.

Q: Avaient-ils besoin de nouvelles constructions?

A: Oui, dans les villes et ruraux aussi.

Q: C'étaient des constructions de bonne qualité?

A: Non...

Q: Avez-vous beaucoup voyagé en Ethiopie?

A: Oui.

Q: Comment avez-vous voyagé?

A: En auto.

Q: Où avez-vous passé vos vacances quand vous étiez en Ethiopie?

A: Nous avons passé nos vacances à Harrar.

* * * * *

A little show of kindness when comprehension fails at level S-1:

Q: Savez-vous à quelle heure vous partez pour Houston?

A: Je pars à quatorze heures moins vingt.

Q: Et à quelle heure arrivez-vous à Houston?

A: J'arrive à six heures moins vingt.

Q: Est-ce qu'il y a longtemps que vous êtes allé à Houston?

A: ....?

Q: Vous allez rendre visite à votre famille?

A: Oui.

Q: Qui allez-vous voir?

A: ... je vois mon ...

Q: Votre père? Votre mère?

A: Non ...

Q: Cousin? Cousine?

A: Cousin, cousine...

Q: Vous avez vu le film 'Cousin, cousine'?

A: Non.

Q: Quand êtes-vous allé à Houston, la dernière fois?

A: C'est mon premier fois.

* * * * *

Re-phrasing of questions when candidate does not understand; level S-1:

Q: Dans quel service du Département d'Etat travaillez-vous?

A: ....?

Q: Le Département d'Etat est très grand...

A: Ah! oui, du Foreign Service.

Q: Le Foreign Service est très grand... Dans quel service travaillez-vous?

A: ....?

Q: Dans quelle organisation du Département d'Etat travaillez-vous?

A: ....?

Q: Dans quel bureau exactement?

A: Ah! Pour le DCM.[1]

Q: Maintenant, vous travaillez pour le DCM?

A: Non, no no. C'est mon premier apointement avec le gouvernement.

Q: Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous pour le Département d'Etat? Quand avez-vous commencé?

A: Répétez, s'il vous plaît?

Q: Quand avez-vous commencé à travailler pour le Département d'Etat?

A: March huit.

Q: Quand avez-vous fait votre dernier voyage en Floride?

A: Par avion.

Q: Quand? Il y a longtemps?

A: Ah! oui, depuis six mois. Quand j'ira à Mopouto, je prends un avion à Miami, pour un jour.

Q: Et ensuite?

A: Oui.

Q: Et après? De miami, où irez-vous?

A: Pardon? Je ne vous comprends pas.

Q: Vous irez à Miami pour un jour, et ensuite où irez-vous?

A: Je prends l'avion à Rio. Depuis, Johanesberg à Mopouto.

* * * * *

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[1] DCM = Deputy Chief of Mission

Searching for the imparfait and a possible 'si clause' at level S-2:

Q: Pourquoi avez-vous tant voyagé?

A: Mon travail; j'étais militaire, dans l'armée.

Q: Et pourquoi l'avez-vous quittée?

A: Je voudrais, ... je voulais ... je vaudrais travailler pour le Département d'Etat.

Q: Mais vous dites que vous voulez habiter en Caroline du Nord... En général, quand on travaille pour le Département d'Etat, c'est parce qu'on veut voyager. Mais vous, vous voulez... habiter en Caroline du Nord...

A: Après avoir voyagé, je voudrais habiter en Caroline du Nord.

Q: Pour toujours?

A: Pas pour toujours, mais pour peut-être cinq ans.

Q: Et si vous n'obtenez pas ce poste en Caroline du Nord, quelle sera votre réaction? Que ferez-vous?

A: J'espérais que je pouverais travail en Californie.

Q: En quoi est-ce que ça consistait d'être garde du corps de la reine de Jordanie?

A: Por exemple, si la femme de le roi Hussein est allée pour faire des courses, je devais suivi elle et si elle est allée au magasin, je devais suivi, etc...

* * * * *

Checking the passé-composé and the imparfait at level S-2:

Q: Où êtes-vous née?

A: En Angleterre.

Q: Quel âge aviez-vous quand vous êtes venue ici?

A: Douze ou treize ans.

Q: Vous allez en Angleterre de temps en temps?

A: Oui, je suis allée en Angleterre pour mes vacances, et l'année dernière, j'ai visité l'Angleterre.

The first passé-composé does not fit into the context and the interviewer tries to verify the candidate's intent:

Q: C'était votre première visite?

A: Non, c'est troisième visite en Angleterre.

Q: Quand avez-vous commencé à travailler pour l'AID[1]?

A: Je travaillais pour deux semaines.

Q: Où avez-vous fait vos études?

A: Je fais mes études à Columbia University; j'ai étudié les ressources du monde et les économiques internationales.

Q: C'est votre premier travail?

A: Non, j'ai travaillé pendant presque un an pour les avocats, à New York. J'étais un paralegal assistant.

Trying to elicit a conditional at level S-2:

Q: Savez-vous où vous allez?

A: On dit que je suis assignée pour l'Haute-Volta, mais aujourd'hui, on a dit que peut-être je travaille Kénia.

Q: Qu'est-ce que vous préféreriez?

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[1] AID = Agency for International Development

A: Ouagadougou est plus pauvre, mais Kénia est plus civilisé.

Q: Qu'est-ce que vous préfériez, alors, Nairobi ou Ouagadougou?

A: Je pense que Ouagadougou est plus intéressant.

Q: Vous connaissez Washington?

A: Oui, je connais un petit peu.

Q: Est-ce que vous aimeriez habiter à Washington?

A: Oui, c'est une ville un peu différente.

Q: Est-ce que vous ne devez pas faire un stage avant de partir?

A: On dit que c'est bon si on peut faire ça.

Q: Qu'est-ce que vous préféreriez, partir directement ou faire un stage?

A: Je préfère voyager directement.

Finding out how far the candidate can go into something complex at level S-2:

Q: Les diplômes de votre père sont-ils anglais ou américains?

A: Le diplôme de mon père est anglais.

Q: Comment a-t-il pu exercer la profession d'architecte?

A: Il est un agrément entre Angleterre et les Etats-Unis pour ça.

Q: Pour tous les architectes ou simplement pour lui?

A: Non. C'est difficile pour quelques personnes s'ils n'ont pas les diplômes, mais s'ils ont les diplômes, c'est pas difficile.

* * * * *

Making sure the candidate intended to use a certain tense at level S-3:

Q: Où est-ce que vous travaillez?

A: J'étais à l'OCDE.[1]

Q: Vous n'y êtes plus, maintenant?

A: Non, je suis ici.

Checking verb tenses while giving the candidate a chance to talk about his/her field; level S-3:

Q: De quels problèmes est-ce que vous vous occupiez à l'OCDE?

A: J'étais membre du comité des transactions invisibles, c'est-à-dire les contrôles sur les paiements, surtout sur les mouvements de capitaux.

Q: Avec qui est-ce que vous étiez le plus souvent en contact? Quelle sorte de personnes?

A: Avec mes collègues des autres délégations, les membres du comité, qui s'occupaient avec des affaires financières.

Q: Est-ce que vous rencontriez beaucoup de Français?

A: Pas beaucoup, la délégation française est minuscule; elle peut appeler tous les officiels du gouvernement français. Il n'est pas nécessaire de maintenir une délégation française.

* * * * *

Eliciting a past conditional; level S-3:

Q: Votre femme travaillait?

A: Non, ce n'est pas possible; comme vous le savez, n'est-ce pas, il faut un permis, ce qui n'est pas possible pour une Américaine.

Q: Elle n'aurait pas pu travailler dans une organisation américaine?

---

[1] OCDE = Organisation pour la Coopération et le Dévelopement Economiques
(In English, OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)

A: Vous avez raison, ça aurait été possible, mais les positions dans les organisations internationales ne sont pas nombreuses.

* * * * *

In search of the conditional, past or present, at level S-3:

Q: Est-ce que vous auriez aimé rester en Tunisie?

A: Peut-être quelques mois encore, mais pas plus.

Q: Pourquoi?

A: J'en avais marre.

Q: Et si on vous avait demandé de renouveler votre contrat? Vous auriez accepté?

A: Ça dépend... je pense que je pouvais continuer à travailler pour eux si je voulais, mais je préfère à chercher du travail ailleurs.

Q: Vous dites que vous ne pouviez pas sortir le soir?

A: Je pouvais, avec les autres gens, si je voulais, mais ce n'était pas très intéressant...

Q: Qu'est-ce qui aurait pu vous arriver si vous étiez sortie le soir?

A: Rien; la Tunisie est le pays arabe le plus développé.

Q: Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire maintenant? Est-ce que vous envisageriez la possibilité de rester à Washington?

A: Oui... l'idéal sera si je peux avoir un travail ici et aussi voyager un petit peu de temps en temps...

Q: Dans quel pays voudriez-vous aller?

A: J'aimerais bien voir le Cameroun.

* * * * *

Trying to narrow the subject and elicit shorter answers from a candidate who tends toward monologue; level S-3:

(After wading through lengthy explanations on the educational system in Africa and a description of an agricultural school in California, the interviewer finally manages to give the conversation a more personal trend.)

Q: Qu'est-ce que vous avez planté, vous-même?

A: Là-bas, vous avez la production d'espèces légumineuses, particulièrement le pois chiche... donc, je l'ai planté plusieurs fois.

(He starts to generalize again.)

Q: Quand vous cultiviez quelque chose comme ça, il fallait que vous fassiez un rapport écrit? Pour être noté? Comment est-ce que les professeurs jugeaient vos progrès?

A: Ce n'est pas les professeurs qui le jugent. C'est-à-dire que c'est à vous de déterminer si vos projets marchent ou si ça ne marche pas.

(He goes on into more examples...)

Q: Vous est-il arrivé de planter quelque chose que vous aviez du mal à vendre?

A: Oui.

Q: Quoi, par exemple?

A: Les broccoli.

(There follow some statistics...)

Donc, pour nous, le marché a tombé juste au moment de la récolte.

Q: Et vous ne pouviez pas prévoir que le prix allait descendre?

A: Oui, mais le marché est tres dynamique. Si vous pouvez déterminer quel prix il sera la semaine prochaine, vous pouvez faire n'importe quelle chose dans l'agriculture.

* * * * *

Cutting short a candidate who appears to be reciting something prepared and who seems determined to stick to a few chosen topics; level S-3:

> (This one's style is unusually flowery, almost poetical. She has a way out when she doesn't like the trend of the conversation, such as: 'J'ai mauvaise mémoire, je ne peux pas me rappeler assez de détails pour me débrouiller dans ce domaine...' or: 'J'hésite à répondre à cette question, parce que...' After one such reply, the interviewer picks a fairly safe subject.)

Q: Vous avez des projets pour les vacances?

A: Je compte voyager à ...

Q: Pourquoi avez-vous choisi d'aller à ...?

(There follows a long tirade.)

A: Je suis sure que la raison puisse vous intéresser, c'est la suivante: je vais vous dire mes impressions sur le premier week-end que j'étais à... A mon arrivée...
Le lendemain, j'ai décidé d'organiser mon temps de façon à pouvoir connaitre à fond cette ville, aussi vite que possible...
... je me suis assise à la terrasse d'un café ...
les artistes qui faisaient leurs expositions étaient en grande partie des émigrants... ça me choquait de voir...

Q: Pourquoi avez-vous...

A: Pardon... ça me choquait de voir la douleur représentée dans leurs oeuvres.

Q: Alors, pourquoi avez-vous choisi de retourner à...? J'ai l'impression que vous avez bien visité la ville... vous faites une description assez complète, alors, pourquoi avez-vous choisi d'y retourner?

A: J'ai choisi d'y retourner à cause de toutes ces impressions que j'ai reçues de ma dernière visite. Par exemple, je n'ai pas fini vous dire ce que je faisais pendant ce week-end... J'ai flâné sur la plage... la plage était très bondée, mais...

Q: Excusez-moi, est-ce que les plages sont dangereuses là-bas?

A: Dangereuses? Pourquoi, madame?

Q: Pour nager, par exemple, est-ce qu'il y a beaucoup de courants?

A: Non, pas du tout...

Q: Est-ce qu'elles sont bien gardées? Est-ce qu'il y a des maîtres-nageurs qui surveillent?

A: Oui, elles sont bien gardées... Quelqu'un m'avait dit qu'on pouvait se baigner six mois par an et pour cette raison d'aller à la plage c'est un bon divertissement, n'est-ce pas?

Q: Vous vous êtes baignée? Vous avez eu le temps de vous baigner?

A: Non, je n'ai pas eu le temps de me baigner. Mais il y a des autres choses à ....aussi.

Q: Comment se fait-il qu'on ne puisse pas se baigner toute l'année... parce qu'il fait très chaud dans ce pays, non? Vous avez dit qu'on ne pouvait se baigner que six mois par an...

A: Les hivers sont très doux.

Q: Oui, alors, comment se fait-il qu'on ne puisse pas se baigner toute l'année?

A: Oh! toute l'année...Encore, il y a la saison d'hiver, il il y a les vents, et, une fois ou deux, ça arrive qu'il y a les neiges. Mais en tout cas, les hivers sont très doux.

* * * * *

Samples of questions which have elicited some worth-while answers at levels S-4 and S-5:

Ecology:

- Je ne vois pas très bien le rapport entre les affaires internationales et l'environnement...
- Quelle sorte d'accueil avez-vous quand vous avez des réunions avec des gens pour leur expliquer, par exemple, que les baleines sont en danger?

- Quelle est l'attitude des Anglais vis-à-vis de la préservation des animaux?

- Savez-vous ce qui se fait dans la lutte contre la désertification et la sécheresse?

- Quelles sont les conséquences de la poussée d'une forêt sur l'environnement immédiat, faune et flore?

Administration:

- Comment vous y prenez-vous pour sélectionner les délégués que vous envoyez?

- Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait, par exemple, que vous n'auriez pas dû faire?

Politics:

- Qu'est-ce qui se passe à Paris, maintenant? Il y a eu des élections...

- Qu'est-ce que les Français pensent des résultats?

- Est-ce qu'il y a toujours des grèves? Quand j'y suis allée en mars il y avait une grève des employés de la sidérurgie...

- Qu'est-ce que c'est que les autonomes?

Archeology:

- Comment sait-on que voilà un bon endroit pour commencer des fouilles?

Psychology:

- Est-ce que le fait d'avoir vécu dans un pays relativement pauvre vous aide à mieux comprendre la mentalité des paysans africains?

Technology:

- Faut-il que vous ayez des connaissances techniques très approfondies pour ça?

- A votre avis, quelle est l'exposition qui a eu le plus de succès pendant tout votre séjour là-bas?

- Est-ce que ce sont les Américains qui sont le plus avancés dans ce domaine?

Help to developing countries:

- En général, est-ce qu'ils sont réfractaires à toute innovation?
- On a beaucoup reproché à certains projets l'utilisation erronée d'insecticides... a-t-on détruit l'équilibre végétal?
- Comment est-ce qu'on peut introduire la culture attelée s'il n'y a pas assez de boeufs, s'il n'y a pas d'eau?
- Que voulez-vous dire par projet ponctuel?
- En matière de développement rural, sur quoi l'accent est-il mis, là-bas?

Economics:

- Quelle va être la situation économique internationale si les pays sous-développés demandent toujours des prix de plus en plus élevés pour leurs matières premières?
- Quels moyens leur faudrait-il pour pouvoir faire pression sur les acheteurs?
- Est-ce qu'en Afrique on se ressent de la baisse du dollar comme en Europe?
- Si le Zaïre tombe, si un régime de gauche prend les choses en main, quel pays d'Afrique risque de représenter le mieux les intérêts capitalistes?
- Vous êtes-vous heurté à de l'animosité quand vous avez essayé de leur vendre du matériel?
- Pouvez-vous me dire en quoi consistent les nouveaux accords qui ont été faits sur le café?

Policy:

- Est-ce que les Français ont les mêmes méthodes que les consultants américains?
- Pouvez-vous me donner un exemple de cette différence?
- Comment faudrait-il qu'ils écrivent leurs rapports, alors, les Français?

GUÍA PARA LOS EXAMINADORES SOBRE EL MODO DE PROCEDER AL TOMAR EL EXAMEN ORAL DEL FSI

Las escalas del FSI de uno a cinco no son una medida de lo que el examinando sabe en un sentido pasivo acerca de un idioma extranjero, sino más bien son un indicio de su habilidad en el uso de él, o, podríamos decir, la medida de cuánto puede decir en otro idioma y de cómo lo emplea.

El criterio más importante para determinar el nivel de proficiencia es el grado de habilidad con que el examinando puede expresarse en las distintas circunstancias a que se le lleva y la capacidad que demuestra del uso del idioma.

Se le debe reconocer la forma de valerse de todos sus conocimientos, ie, la habilidad con que vence obstáculos por medio de circumloquios, la evasión de elementos gramaticales no controlados, así como cualquier dominio de gramática y vocabulario que sea evidente.

Un examen oral como el del FSI, caracterizado por la flexibilidad de su contenido y la más completa objetividad en la aplicación de normas de proficiencia bien definidas, tiene dos características primordiales:

1) Validez del Contenido: o sea, la medida de la habilidad de conversacion se basa en una demostración real.
2) Formato Standard para todos los examinadores.

La facilidad en el hablar debe ser calificada sobre la base de una conversación bastante amplia y natural sin que se introduzcan elementos forzados que no tengan que ver con la vida o el trabajo del individuo en el servicio exterior. Así que, por ejemplo, la técnica o el recurso de asignar papeles para que el individuo actúe de acuerdo con las realidades del servicio diplomático, o del Cuerpo de Paz, es un modo muy eficaz de sacarle al examinando ciertos informes necesarios para llegar a un juicio bien fundado. Unos ejemplos prácticos de esto serían las siguientes situaciones típicas de un sinnúmero de posibilidades: el examinando le describe a un corredor de bienes raíces la clase de casa que busca para alquilar; un vice-cónsul puede entrevistar a quien le solicite una visa para ir a trabajar a los EE.UU.; un voluntario entrevista a un campesino a quien quiere ayudar de alguna manera relacionada con su trabajo; un funcionario de la USIS explica el punto de vista de su gobierno sobre el control de la natalidad o los derechos humanos o la extensión del mar territorial, etc. En cambio, preguntas sobre temas literarios tendientes a comprobar conocimientos en ese campo especializado, o las pruebas escritas sobre la gramática o modismos, por ejemplo, son de muy escaso valor en un examen que pretende medir la facilidad en el uso del idioma hablado.

Aunque se les haya permitido a los examinadores cierta libertad de juicio sobre el contenido del examen oral, es imprescindible que se pongan de acuerdo en lo referente a los elementos básicos que sirven de fondo para poder establecer el nivel de proficiencia según las escalas del FSI. Es preciso que se definan y que se mantengan estas normas para que los resultados sean uniformes entre todos los examinadores. Hay que hacer un esfuerzo especial para que ningún examinador sea conocido por sus exigencias en materia de regionalismos, traducción de poesía, vocabulario técnico, o cosas por el estilo. A continuación hay algunas surgerencias mediante las cuales es posible sacar más datos de los que se suelen captar durante la conversación personal. Esta, sin embargo, debe formar parte de todo examen oral.

Pronunciación

Aquí no hay problema ya que todas las impresiones necesarias se reciben durante la conversación personal con la cual se empieza el examen.

Gramática

Se debe tratar de sacar todos los datos posibles durante la conversación. Con el fin de acordarse bien del control o la falta de control de todos los elementos gramaticales como los pronombres, los verbos reflexivos, los tiempos de los verbos, la concordancia de persona, de número y de género, los mandatos directos, Por y Para, Ser y Estar, el subjuntivo, etc., se puede emplear una especie de 'checklist' u hoja de calificación como la que se adjunta.

Una vez terminada la conversación, si le quedan dudas sobre el control de cualquier elemento gramatical, lo podría sacar a la luz por medio de una de esas 'situaciones' ya citadas en las cuales el examinando desempeña un papel imaginario (verbigracia, compruebe las formas interrogativas pidiendo informes sobre el costo u otros detalles de transporte o alojamiento; compruebe el control de los mandatos directos pidiéndole que haga componer algo como el calzado, la ropa, el automóvil, etc., o se le puede pedir que le sirva de intérprete exigiéndole que traduzca con precisión lo que Ud. diga en inglés en esta situación imaginaria).

Lo que sí se debiera evitar es el empleo de ejercicios que se suelen usar en clase. Además, no se consideran apropiadas las traducciones al vuelo de frases en inglés por ser éstas demasiado forzadas o faltas de naturalidad.

Vocabulario

En los niveles más bajos de las escalas del FSI (S-2 para abajo) los límites del vocabulario de la persona examinada en lo rutinario y lo práctico se pueden averiguar fácilmente pasando más allá de la conversación general sobre temas que le son muy conocidos a proyectos concretos como, por ejemplo, comprar un boleto de autobús, contratar a una cocinera, describirle al médico los síntomas de una enfermedad, etc.

En cambio, en los niveles más altos el vocabulario profesional puede revelarse más fácilmente en una conversación bien dirigida y canalizada por el examinador; el vocabulario general se manifiesta más claramente utilizando el proceso de resolver problemas tales como la remodelación de una cocina, por ejemplo, la descripción de cómo se emplea un teléfono automático o una máquina de coser, o de cómo se juega tenis o de cómo se maneja un auto en el norte de los EE.UU. en invierno cuando hay nieve en las carreteras, o cómo se envuelve un paquete para mandarlo por correo, o se le puede pedir que describa cómo se distingue el calzado masculino del que usan las mujeres. Existe un sinnúmero de posibilidades sacadas de la experiencia de todos los días.

Es importante recordar que hasta la gente culta de habla española, que sirve de base de comparación como representante de la escala más elevada (S-5), no siendo especialista en linguística, muchas veces desconoce términos comunes en ese ramo. Por lo tanto, no se les debe pedir a los examinandos los equivalentes de expresiones que sólo los especialistas podrían saber. Nos interesa más el efecto total de lo que dice la persona que se examina, que el uso de frases sueltas traducidas del inglés al castellano. Además, se puede decir que el circumloquio, o la facilidad para traducir conceptos usando varias palabras comunes que expresen claramente la idea, tiene tanto valor como el empleo de algunas palabras rebuscadas.

Fluidez

No se necesitan procedimientos especiales para medir la fluidez, pero hay que tener presente cierta tendencia a sobreestimar la fluidez cuando se trata de preguntas fáciles de contestar. Es decir que una pregunta sobre un tema muy conocido puede contestarse con relativa facilidad y viceversa. Uno no se debe dejar impresionar demasiado pronto por respuestas cortas y rápidas a preguntas rutinarias.

Lo principal es que la fluidez se debe medir solamente después de haberle dado al examinando la oportunidad de contestar a varias preguntas detenidamente.

Comprensión

Se debe poner más atención a este aspecto del examen para que el resultado refleje con más exactitud los diversos niveles entre la comprensión parcial y completa en las reacciones y respuestas hechas en conversación variada a velocidad normal. Es fácil dejarse engañar en un examen que consiste exclusivamente en una conversación a menos que el que conduzca la conversación tenga cierta experiencia en el arte de hacer preguntas de una sintaxis un tanto más complicada y de un vocabulario más extenso del que se emplea con alguien de proficiencia limitada. Hay que exigirles más a los más avanzados en lo tocante a la comprensión como en todos los demás aspectos del idioma.

En los niveles más bajos se le puede dar al examinando una serie de instrucciones o informes para que actúe o responda, por ejemplo, "Si yo le digo que cierre la puerta, Qué quiero que haga Ud. ," etc. O se le puede describir algo que pasó el día anterior (real o ficticio) para ver si lo entiende. Sin embargo, en todos los niveles la manera más segura de comprobar la comprensión reside en el artificio de hacerle servir de intérprete. Claro que esto debe prepararse con mucho cuidado.

Ciertos refranes y modismos que se entienden en todas partes del mundo hispánico entre la gente culta como, por ejemplo, "Más vale maña que fuerza," "Al país que fueres, haz lo que vieres," "No hay mal que por bien no venga," etc., son elementos admisibles en el examen, pero la falta de conocimiento de algún refrán o modismo no debe nunca ser un factor determinante en el puntaje final. Además, se deberían evitar siempre los regionalismos, barbarismos y palabras raras o arcaicas.

El empleo de vez en cuando de un cambio de tema abrupto sin previo aviso puede ser provechoso siempre que no se llegue al punto de parecer incoherente.

GRAMMATICAL BENCHMARKS FOR SPANISH

A. Essential to Meaning

1. Appropriate use of parts of speech
2. Indication of time
3. Indication of subjects and objects (including person, number, and inanimate gender)
4. Question vs statement vs command

B. Important to Meaning

1. Possessives
2. Single object pronouns
3. Number and persons in verb endings
4. Present vs past vs future
5. Conditional
6. Some prepositions (high frequency)

C. Helpful to Meaning

1. Reflexives
2. *Ser* vs *estar*
3. Preterite vs imperfect vs perfect
4. Present subjunctive
5. Some prepositions (e.g. prep. conj.)

X. Essential to Acceptability

1. Gender in high-frequency nouns

Y. Important to Acceptability

1. Conjugations and irregular verb forms
2. Familiar vs formal address
3. Gender in lower frequency nouns
4. Gender and number agreement in adjectives
5. Adjective placement

Z. Helpful to Acceptability

1. Double object pronouns
2. Past subjunctive
3. Future and conditional of conjecture

S-RATINGS IN SPANISH: CRITERIA AND CHARACTERISTICS

The descriptions below characterize the speaking proficiency found at each level, with special comment on the strengths and weaknesses especially typical of the Peace Corps Volunteer receiving that grade.

S-5 Speaks the language natively, with the ability to use and understand Spanish as accurately, easily, and precisely as a graduate of a Latin American university. Has no non-native features of speech observable to the educated Latin listener.

PCVs with S-5 ratings have no particular linguistic characteristics to distinguish them from other S-5's.

S-4 and S-4+. Speaks the language with almost complete fluency, exactness, and breadth of vocabulary. Usually lacks the easy command of idioms, slang, proverbial expressions, etc. normally obtainable only through childhood residence and education in a Spanish-speaking country, but knows and uses the language well enough to become a competent Spanish teacher, official government interpreter, or business person who could deal efficiently (from a linguistic point of view) with anyone from the President of the country to the village leaders. Speech approximates that of the educated native speaker (but with occasional random non-native usages).

PCVs with S-4 and S-4+ ratings are no different from other S-4's; they differ from other PCVs in their awareness and control of vocabulary and structure, which enable them to follow a number of professional and academic pursuits closed to less competent speakers.

S-3 and S-3+. Speaks the language fluently and accurately enough to be comfortable to listen to and easy to understand. Can comprehend complex discourse and follow conversations between native speakers, and has sufficient vocabulary to describe own work in detail and participate effectively in professional discussions. Controls most of the basic grammatical features of the language (e.g. verb tenses, ser-estar contrast, object pronouns, noun-adjective agreement, subjunctive), and compensates to some extent for those not controlled by paraphrase, circumlocution, and precision of vocabulary. A gap in control of any one basic grammatical feature does not by itself preclude an S-3 or S-3+, but a sufficient combination of systematic errors must limit the examinee to a lower grade. "Professional proficiency" promises the end-user, whether university dean, Government personnel officer, or private-sector employer, the linguistic ability to deal effectively with government or professional counterparts. (S-3 is a high level of competence and is the basis for employee incentive payments in several Government agencies.)

PCVs in this range generally have greater fluency and a broader vocabulary but much less control of structure than S-3's and S-3+'s who have been through longer formal training. They do, however, speak Spanish accurately enough to be immediately useful in jobs at all social and educational levels.

S-2 and S-2+. Can usually communicate uncomplicated ideas and experiences without difficulty and can meet routine job demands. Limitations of vocabulary, structural control, and aural comprehension restrict usefulness to a narrow field of experience and prevent confidence in ability to perform adequately in different linguistic environments.

PCVs at this level are noted for their good pronunciation and fluency, their frequent inability to follow educated discourse, their general lack of grammatical control, and many gaps in vocabulary. Characteristic features of their speech include purely English syntax and a trailing of sentences, with the listener required to supply mentally the words omitted. Their effectiveness in Spanish tends to depend on their personalities rather than their command of the language--a psychological factor FSI is not equipped to measure.

S-1 and S-1+. Can survive among Spanish monolinguals but is very difficult to talk to and understand because of almost almost total unawareness of the structure of the language, extremely limited vocabulary, and poor comprehension and pronunciation. May commmunicate, effectively, but does so by actions and gestures rather than by words.

ON ELICITING FEATURES OF SPANISH

by

Jose Molina and Susana Framiñán

The purpose of the FSI proficiency test is to examine the candidate's knowledge of Spanish. There is not, however, a predetermined set of questions to be asked at each of the levels of our testing scale (S-0 to S-5). When investigating grammatical structures and vocabulary not yet produced by the candidate, the interviewer decides the course the questioning is to take. The interviewer also decides when to lower the difficulty of questions in order to put the candidate at ease.

The questions which follow do not appear in their original order as we wish only to illustrate elicitation techniques of certain grammatical points at the different levels.

* * * * *

Elicitation of ser and estar:

Q: ¿Dónde está su oficina?

A: Está en ... no tengo oficina.

Q: ¿Ud. está estudiando español ahora?

A: Sí.

Q: ¿Puede decirnos, qué hora es?

A: Sí, cuatro y veinticinco.

Q: ¿Ud. es soltero?

A: No comprendo.

Q: ¿Tiene familia?

A: Sí.

Q: ¿Cuántos son en su familia?

A: Dos.

Q: ¿Dónde está su casa?

A: En Massachusetts.

Q: ¿Hasta cuándo está aquí?

A: Hasta 26 de maya.

Q: ¿Cuánto tiempo hace que Ud. está en Washington?

A: Ocho semanas.

Q: ¿Cuál es el número de su apartamento?

A: Es dosciento.

Q: ¿De qué color es su corbata?

A: Es de verde y amarillo.

Q: ¿Qué fecha es hoy?

A: ¿Qué fecha es? --- 16 no sé.

Q: ¿En qué año estamos?

A: En 1977.

* * * * *

Elicitation of ser, estar, and hay:

Q: ¿Qué hizo Ud. en Turquía?

A: Estaba abogado militario por las fuerzas aéreas.

Q: ¿Había muchos soldados de la fuerza aérea allá?

A: Sí, muchas personal vinieron en la Turquía.

Q: ¿Hay mucha diferencia entre las leyes militares y las leyes civiles?

A: Sí, hay mucha diferencia porque leyes que me gusto es leyes de trabajo y leyes de militario es de personas militario.

Q: ¿Ud. va a estar los dos primeros años en diferentes secciones?

A: El primer año voy a trabajar en la sección de visas.

Q: Ud. es casado ¿verdad?

A: Sí, soy casado.

Q: ¿Y su esposa es oficial también?

A: Sí. Mí esposa es oficial del departamento de estado también.

Q: ¿Cuáles eran algunas de las diferencias entre la vida de Turquía y la vida en los E.E.U.U.?

A: En Turquía la comida es muy cara, y el petrol es también muy cara, el ropa son muy cara, --- la inflación es muy difícil.

* * * * *

Elicitation of ser, estar, and hay:

Q: ¿Cuándo estuvo Ud. en España?

A: Estuve en España en el año 1961.

Q: ¿Dónde estuvo?

A: En Madrid, al llegar fuimos a las costa Norte, a Santander. Vivimos en Santander 2 meses. Asistí a la escuela de verano.

Q: ¿Por qué fué a Galicia y no a Asturias?

A: Estuve en Asturias en julio y agosto.

Q: ¿Entonces volvió a los E.E.U.U.?

A: Yo volví a los E.E.U.U. para ser instructor de español.

Q: ¿Ud. va a seguir enseñando español?

A: No, voy a ser agregado militar en el Ecuador. No voy a ser profesor de español. Es más importante ser representante de su país que ser profesor de español.

Q: ¿Es la primera vez que va a desempeñar ese puesto?

A: Sí, yo he sido miembro de un grupo militar, pero para desempeñar este papel de agregado es la primera vez para mí.

Q: ¿Cuánto tiempo va a estar en Quito?

A: Voy a estar en Quito por 3 años.

Q: ¿Qué ventajas hay en Quito?

A: El costo de vida es más bajo.

* * * * *

Elicitation of subjunctive and conditional:

Q: ¿Y si Ud. no hubiera ido a España?

A: Hubiera sido imposible ser instructor si no hubiera ido a España.

Q: ¿Qué sugiere Ud. para los que están aprendiendo español ahora?

A: Yo les diría que la cosa más importante es no simplemente entender el idioma, sino también entender algo de las raíces de las personas de habla español, también algo de los países donde se van cuando terminen sus estudios.

Q: Para lograr eso que Ud. dice, ¿qué les aconseja?

A: Tratar de no simplemente aprender el idioma sino también, buscar personas que viven aquí, que hablan el idioma, que puedan darles información de los países.

Q: ¿No preferiría otro país de America Latina?

A: Yo sé que muchos norteamericanos creen que SudAmérica, que todos los países son iguales. Y yo sé que son muy diferentes.

* * * * *

Elicitation of subjunctive:

(Present, Past and Conditional)

Q: ¿Por qué era necesario que Ud. leyera esos documentos?

A: Era necesario porque era necesario que yo sepa todo lo nuevo de los derechos humanos.

Q: Tan pronto como llegue a Argentina, ¿qué va a hacer Ud.?

A: Tan pronto como llegue a Argentina buscaría una casa.

Q: ¿Cómo quiere que sea la casa?

A: Para nosotros sería necesario una casa grande.

Q: ¿Ud. quiere que esté en el centro o en las afueras?

A: No creo que esté en el centro muchas casas con 5 dormitorios.

Q: ¿Qué va a hacer su esposo en Argentina?

A: Espero que pueda hacer informes.

* * * * *

Elicitation of subjunctive:

(Present, Past and Conditional)

Q: ¿Qué es necesario que haga para poder terminar su entrenamiento con la ICA*?

A: Pues depende en la lengua.

---

*ICA - International Communications Agency

Q: ¿Es posible que Ud. salga en agosto?

A: Sí, es posible.

Q: ¿A qué país le gustaría ir?

A: No me importa, yo quiero ir a América del Sur, a Europa.

Q: ¿Ud. le ha pedido, a la ICA que la mande a América Latina?

A: Sí, pero no me importa.

Q: ¿Tuvo la oportunidad de seleccionar un puesto a donde le gustaría que la mandaran?

A: Sí, pero ellos van a mandarme donde quieren.

Q: Si la mandaran a América del Sur, ¿a cuál país le gustaría ir?

A: No a Central América, quiero ir a Brasil.

Q: ¿Cuál sería su posición si fuera al extranjero?

A: La información y los programas culturales.

* * * * *

Elicitation of past tenses:

(Preterite and/or Imperfect)

Q: ¿Dónde aprendió español?

A: Mi familia está en Perú, en Venezuela.

Q: ¿Cursó sus estudios en escuelas latinoamericanas?

A: No, en escuela americana.

Q: ¿Podía hablar en español con fluidez cuando vivía en esos países?

A: No, creo que no, puedo entender casi todo.

Q: ¿Qué hacía su papá?

A: Fué minero.

Q: ¿Cuánto tiempo viveron ustedes ahí?

A: Yo para 2 años, ellos para casi 15.

Q: ¿Con quién vivía usted cuando volvió a los E.E.U.U.?

A: En la escuela.

Q: ¿Con qué frecuencia veía a sus padres?

A: Un vez por año.

Q: ¿Ellos venían aquí o usted iba allá?

A: Yo fué allá.

Q: ¿Dónde vivía antes?

A: Con amigos.

Q: Pero, ¿vivía en esta área?

A: No, antes de esto en Dallas, Texas.

Q: ¿Qué hacía usted ahí? ¿Dónde trabajaba?

A: Trabajaba en la universidad de Texas en la escuela de medicina, donde había un proyecto de planificación familiar.

* * * * *

Elicitation of past tenses:

(Preterite and/or Imperfect)

Q: Antes de venir a Washington, ¿que hacía Ud.?

A: Acababa de terminar un programa de la planificación urbana y antes termino un programa de español que está en la Universidad en Ohio.

Q: ¿Quiénes eran sus profesores de español en la Universidad en Ohio?

A: Pues yo tuve un profesor de España, la mayoría, la primera era una mujer que se llama ... y también tuve dos profesores americanos.

Q: ¿Qué otros sujetos estudiaba?

A: Estudié el historia del arte, etc.

Q: Cuando asistía a la universidad de Ohio, ¿dónde vivía?

A: Vivía en el dormitorio por la mayoría...

Q: ¿Usted recibió una beca para estudiar en la Universidad?

A: Sí.

Q: ¿En qué consistía la beca que recibió?

A: Tuvo que trabajar en la oficina de planificación.

Q: ¿Que hacía cuando iba a la oficina?

A: Tuve que dibujar diferentes mapos.

Q: ¿Qué tuvo que hacer para obtener este trabajo con su agencia?

A: Una aplicación oral, tuve que escribir una autobiográfica de yo.

Q: ¿Cuándo supo que la ICA la había aceptado?

A: En noviembre.

* * * * *

Elicitation of Ser, Estar, Haber Subjunctive

(Present, Past, and Conditional)

Q: ¿Diría Ud. que es muy diferente el tipo de vida que se hace allá, al tipo de vida que Ud. hace aquí en los E.E.U.U.?

A: Sí, el tipo de vida era más lento que aquí, y me gustaba mucho.

Q: ¿No le habría gustado quedarse por más tiempo?

A: No, porque tengo un problema, porque la ley de Grecia no permite a los ciudadanos del país demitir su ciudadanía.

Q: ¿Aunque sus padres hayan nacido aquí?

A: Sí.

Q: ¿Hay un límite de edad para que lo puedan reclutar?

A: La límite es la edad de 50.

Q: ¿Hay muchos países que tengan este tipo de leyes?

A: Creo que no, creo que la razón es que hay muchos griegos por todo el mundo.

Q: ¿Si no hubiera habido esta regulación cuando Ud. estaba allá, habría considerado la posibilidad de quedarse un tiempo?

A: Sí, si ese reglamento no existiera consideraría quedarme aquí por un rato.

Q: ¿Por qué es necesario que una persona que estudia leyes tome un curso de anatomía?

A: No era necesario, pero tenía mucho interes en anatomía.

Q: No cree Ud. que es una lástima que tengan este entrenamiento consular después de haber estudiado español?

A: Sí, creo que sí, si el entrenamiento consular fuera después del entrenamiento de lengua, sería más fácil para saber cuáles cosas sería necesario aprender en el otro idioma.

Q: ¿No cree que después que haya pasado un mes se le va a olvidar todo el español?

A: Pues, ojalá que no.

Q: ¿Nos podría describir una de estas situaciones?

A: Una de las situaciones es que un norteamericano se ha muerto, y el ejercicio es que hay que ir a la policía o al hospital para averiguar la causa de la muerte.

THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

C. Cleland Harris[1]

Usually three people are involved in an oral proficiency test at the Foreign Service Institute: the candidate, the interviewer (normally a native-speaking instructor of the target language), and a certified examiner (either a senior instructor or a supervising linguist). The role of the interviewer is to carry on the conversation that is the substance of the test; the role of the examiner is to chair the test (unobtrusively), take notes (as inconspicuously as possible) on both the weaknesses and the strengths exhibited by the candidate, assist the interviewer whenever necessary to assure that the interview produces an adequate sample, and to confer with the candidate later to analyze the test and explain the rating.

If this is the candidate's first experience with an oral interview test, it is a good idea for the examiner to describe briefly what is about to happen, perhaps as follows:

"What we are going to do is to converse with you for a number of minutes in (Spanish). On the basis of this small sample, we will try to determine where we would place you on the proficiency scale. Normally, the higher your proficiency, the longer our conversation. Your role is to assume that we are in a monolingual environment like that of some foreign country; therefore, try not to use any English. (Mrs. Ortega) will lead you in this conversation, and her role is that of a person who knows absolutely no English. My role is that of note-taker; I want to have as complete a record as possible of this exercise. I will be writing down two things: weaknesses and strengths. We need to know as much about your strengths as we need to know about any weaknesses. Therefore, if you see me jot something down, don't think that it's a mistake; I may have heard a good sample of something that reflects your strength.

---

[1] Catherine Hanna of the FSI French Section and Isabel Lowery of the FSI Spanish Section contributed valuable suggestions to this paper.

"Finally, unless you are bilingual, there will be times when we will be asking you some questions which you may not understand. Don't let this worry you. What we are doing is probing to see how high on our scale we can place you. Our efforts, our style, and our techniques are all directed toward showing how good you are, not how weak you may be." The interviewer then proceeds with the conversation.

The following four characteristics of the talents of an interviewer are almost always present in a good test:

(1) The experienced interviewer gives the impression that the entire exercise is a most pleasant conversation, usually about the candidate's personal life and work.

(2) The experienced interviewer also seems to be conducting this exercise effortlessly, going from one topic to another as naturally as in a real conversation.

(3) The experienced interviewer is always in control. If a candidate starts to dominate the conversation and rambles on and on, the interviewer will alter this by asking questions more frequently and by asking questions requiring specific answers.

(4) And the experienced interviewer relies heavily on information questions, rather than yes/no questions, and gives the candidate time to amplify answers.

There are three stages[1] in typical tests:

- The Initial Stage
- The Probing Stage
- The Confirming Stage

Initial Stage

This is the "get acquainted" stage. It is usually what happens between the interviewer and the candidate immediately after they meet. It consists of "small talk" that lasts for only a minute or so.

The interviewer should use this short, initial stage to get two things accomplished:

- To make the candidate feel more at ease. Candidates are usually nervous.
- To establish an approximate notion of the probable level of proficiency of the candidate.

During this initial stage, the attempt should be made to avoid questions that would be difficult for the candidate to answer; this would only add to nervousness. Similarly, no jokes should be used for the same reason, no matter how normal it might

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[1] I am indebted to Dr. Allen I. Weinstein, head of the FSI Germanic language section, for the framework of the three stages. His own presentation of it appears on p. 106.

STEPS IN A SPEAKING TEST

by Allen I. Weinstein

I. WARM-UP

DO	DON'T	OBSERVE
Put the candidate at ease. Remember he or she is nervous. Engage in small talk; for example, ask about a former student of yours now at the post he or she just came from. BE NATURAL, as you are in the classroom. Smile and be willing to laugh with (not at!) the candidate.	Force the candidate with complicated questions. Don't have a separate conversation with the linguist. Don't try to change your personality just because you're testing.	How the candidate reacts to you. Establish his or her probable range: "Can't possibly be an S-4, and surely better than an an S-1." When you think you know the best performance the candidate is capable of, go on to PROBE.

II. PROBE

DO	DON'T	OBSERVE
Keep in mind the definitions of the levels. Now ask substantive questions at the lowest level you estimated during the warm-up. Let the candidate make his or her own test: this is best done by asking him what kind of work the candidate did at the last post, or what kind of work the candidate will do at the next one. Keep on asking more difficult questions until you think you're sure of the candidate's level.	Wear the candidate down by asking many questions at the same level. (If you spend 15 minutes talking about the rooms in this candidate's house, the last 13 will probably have been wasted.) Don't ask about things the candidate doesn't know or would not be expected to know. Don't finish sentences for the candidate, even though you might in the classroom; if you do you miss a valuable opportunity to find out how well the candidate can cope.	How easily the candidate handles the subject matter. If the candidate does so fluently and with more information than you expected, you are ready to move up one level. When you think you have a pretty good idea of what level the candidate is at go on to CONFIRM.

III. CONFIRM

DO	DON'T	OBSERVE
Ask one or two more questions at one level higher than your probes gave you. Make them long enough to insure a test of comprehension.	Protract the test. (You can lower the score just by wearing the candidate out.)	Listen for details, and things you weren't quite sure about During your probing. If you can't confirm your feeling, go back and probe some more at a high level, then confirm again by moving one level still higher.

seem to utter a "cute" saying if this were a real situation. One should open the conversation with the normal courtesies of having just met somebody, as "How are you?", "I am very pleased to meet you", "How do you pronounce your name?", and so forth.

It is wise to avoid complexity at this stage. In Spanish, for example, a normal yet unfortunate question that often comes to mind in the opening moments of the conversation is ¿Hace mucho tiempo que nos espera? "Have you been waiting for us very long?" This is usually a difficult construction for English speakers to understand and to use; therefore, though normal, it could distress instead of relax the candidate.

Probing Stage

Keeping in mind the definitions of the levels of proficiency, the interviewer should proceed to ask questions that test the impression made during the brief, initial stage. If the initial estimate was too high, then the interviewer should immediately drop down to an easier level; one should never insist on asking questions for which one is not getting answers. If the interviewer is satisfied that the original estimate was a correct one, it is time to proceed to the next and final stage.

Confirming Stage

The interviewer should try to ask more difficult and more complicated questions to see if the candidate can indeed perform above the expectations already established. As long as appropriate, the interviewer proceeds upwards. When the candidate's ceiling appears to have been reached, the interviewer may try one or two more questions above the candidate's level; to avoid embarrassing the candidate, the questions can be interspersed with "answerable" ones.

Once the examiner is satisfied that there is enough information on which to base a sound opinion, the test is over. Late in the test it is customary for the interviewer to ask the examiner if the latter wishes to add anything, thus providing an opening for further probing and confirming through some supplementary exercise, such as interpreting.[1]

The process from the Initial Stage through the Confirming Stage requires differing lengths of time depending on the candidate's level and on the experience and sophistication of the interviewer. If the candidate cannot qualify at the S-0+ level, the test is over rather quickly. Sometimes we are able to establish very quickly that a candidate is, say, S-1; in such cases we may extend the test a few minutes to avoid embarrassment and to assure that the candidate regards it as an adequate test. In French and Spanish, the two languages that have the highest volume of tests at the Foreign Service Institute and therefore the greatest experience among examiners and interviewers, oral tests usually take from 10 to 30 minutes, somewhat more time being required above the S-3 level than below it. It is interesting to note however that, when the candidate is an educated native speaker of the language or has equivalent proficiency, it does not take long to establish the fact. Our tests of S-5 candidates are therefore among our shortest.

Ideas and Suggestions for New Interviewers

Following is a collection of ideas and suggestions gathered from some of our experienced interviewers and examiners:

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[1] See page 111.

-- It is a good idea to prepare a list of the grammatical features that characterize the language in question. Add to this list a sample or model question that could be used to solicit each grammar point. If you need to, you can always glance at the list. It can also serve as a "check-off" as to which points have been solicited and which ones have not.

-- If you are the interviewer, don't try to take notes; let your examiner colleague do the note-taking. It is difficult to conduct a smooth-flowing conversation and take adequate notes at the same time.

-- Remember, you are not conducting an interrogation but a conversation.

-- Be genuinely interested in what the candidate is saying. You will find that, with this interest, the candidate will respond more freely and may even show enthusiasm.

-- Avoid uncomfortable silent periods, but at the same time don't finish sentences for the candidate; if you do, you miss an opportunity to learn what the candidate can do.

-- Near the beginning, give the candidate a chance to display ability, especially if you suspect S-2 proficiency or higher; this can be done by asking what kind of work the candidate has been doing or is going to do.

-- Don't have a separate conversation with the examiner.

-- Observe how the candidate handles your questions; edit your interview accordingly. If the candidate answers fluently and with abandon, this is your cue to move up to more complicated and challenging subjects and structures.

-- Pay attention and listen. You are under a certain amount of stress yourself because you are constantly editing and structuring your interview. However, there is nothing more disconcerting and disappointing to the candidate than to have the same question asked again later on in the interview.

-- Don't change subjects abruptly without some form of transition announcing the change such as, for example, "Now that you mentioned that, and moving on to something not too unrelated, what would you have done...?"

-- Don't protract the test. Be willing to end the test just as soon as you and the examiner are satisfied with the information presented and satisfied that the candidate will feel that it has been an adequate test.

INTERPRETER SITUATIONS

Stephen P. J. Zappala

Interpreter situations can be very useful in assessing ability to communicate in certain situations. They force the candidate to choose between using certain grammatical constructions and vocabulary presented by the situation in English and seeking refuge in a circumlocution.

While interpreter situations may be used to assess speaking proficiency at any level, they are most commonly used at FSI in two kinds of cases: when testing for S-3 or better and when trying to determine whether one is S-0+ or S-1. The manner in which the candidate is able to explain what needs to be explained varies according to level of proficiency. A lower-level candidate is often sketchy and omits detail. A higher-level candidate tends to use a more sophisticated and more detailed language.

Interpreter situations may be classified into three types:

Type 1. Role playing with detailed instructions from examiner.

Type 2. Line-by-line interpretation with no prepared script.

Type 3. Line-by-line interpretation with prepared script.

Role playing (Type 1)

In this situation the examiner gives the candidate a detailed explanation in English of the role (s)he is to play with the interviewer in the target language. The candidate is then free to phrase his/her utterances in any manner that conveys the information required by the role. At the end of the role playing, the candidate, in the role of interpreter for the examiner, explains to the latter in English what took place and what the interviewer said.

Line-by-line interpretation (Types 2 and 3)

The examiner explains that the candidate is to pretend that the interviewer speaks no English and that the examiner does not speak the target language. Therefore, the candidate is to act as interpreter. Whatever the interviewer says is to be conveyed to the examiner in English and whatever the examiner says in English is to be conveyed to the interviewer in the target language.

If there is no prepared script, the candidate may interpret by using phrases like, '(S)he says that ...' Both the examiner and the interviewer improvise as the situation is enacted. Even though the candidate may misinterpret something, both the examiner and the interviewer should continue the role playing in accordance with what the candidate says. By improvising, the examiner and/or the interviewer may make the situation easier or more difficult as the need arises.

If there is a prepared script, the candidate should be told to interpret what is actually said, without using phrases like, '(S)he says that...' No improvisation is needed except at times when the candidate has misinterpreted something. At such times adjustments may be called for or, if the misinterpretation is great enough, the situation may be terminated. The advantage of a prepared script is that one does not on the spot have to think of ways of introducing certain forms or grammatical constructions that one wishes to test.

Examples:

(Type 1)

(to determine whether one is S-0+ or S-1)

1. You enter a hotel and ask for a room for yourself for two weeks.

   Tell the hotel clerk that your wife and three children are coming at the end of two weeks.

   Tell him the ages of your two boys and one girl. You want two rooms, one for the children, and the other for you and your wife. Be sure the clerk knows that you will all have breakfast in your rooms.

2. You enter a small restaurant where no English is spoken and the menu is entirely in the target language. Order dinner and drinks for your wife, two children, and yourself.

3. It is 1:00 P.M. on Saturday. Telephone the famous restaurant, Maxim's, to reserve a table for ten for the same evening at 8:00 o'clock.

(for higher levels)

4. It is the beginning of a workday at the office. Give your secretary instructions for the day. Among other things, ask her to cancel an appointment at 11:00 which you have with a professor from the National University because you must go to the airport to meet an official who is arriving from Washington. Instruct her about two letters which you wish to have written, and also ask her to remind you of an appointment you have at 3:00 with Dr. Martin.

5. Take your old grey suit to the tailor and ask him to turn the cuffs on the trouser pants. Tell him, too, that you need to let the pants out one inch in the back. Ask how much the alteration will cost and on what day the pants will be ready.

6. You have recently had the brakes of your car re-lined, but now when you put your foot on the brake, the car pulls to the right. You drive into a garage, explain your problem, and ask to have the air taken out of the brake line. If the mechanic tries to sell you something new, convince him otherwise. (NOTE: the mechanic tries to sell the candidate a new master cylinder.)

(Type 2)

Examiner: Ask for a room for me for two weeks.
Candidate: (in target language).
Interviewer: (in target language).
Examiner, if necessary: What did (s)he say?
Candidate: (in English).

Examiner: Tell him/her that my wife and three children are coming at the end of two weeks. My sons are three and five and my daughter is six. Will you have two rooms then, one for the children and the other for me and my wife?

etc.

(Type 3)

(E = examiner; I = interviewer)
(NOTE: The examiner's role is in English, the interviewer's in the target language. The candidate interprets.)

Script 1.

E: I'd like a room for myself for 2½ weeks.

I: A single?

E: Well really, my wife and three children will be coming at the end of two weeks. I'd like a single now, but after two weeks I'll need two rooms: one for the children, and the other for me and my wife.

I: That'll be fine. We have one room available on the fifth floor, but there's an elevator. You could use this room for two weeks. Then we'll be able to make accommodations for you on the third floor when your wife and children arrive.

E: What kind of rooms would these be on the third floor?

I: We'll have two adjoining rooms available, both with baths, plenty of hot water, and plenty of closet space. One room has a double bed, but if you prefer, you may have twin beds instead. The other has two beds and another can always be added.

E: Fine. How much will the various rooms come to?

I: The other rooms will be each ...... per day.

Script 2.

I: What's the trouble?

E: I don't know. I was brought here for no apparent reason by this policeman.

I: It states here that you made a left turn into a one-way street.

E: If I did, I'm very sorry. I didn't see any sign either restricting a left turn or indicating a one-way street.

I: I see this took place on (name of street) at the corner of (name of street). This means that you were driving in what direction?

E: I was driving toward the railroad station.

I: Was the traffic heavy at the intersection of these two streets when you made the left turn?

E: When I made the left turn there seemed to be very little traffic.

I: And you didn't see any signs?

E: No, I didn't see any.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE TAPES

The tapes which accompany this manual are selected recordings of actual tests. They are examples from the central part of each test. Greetings, introductions and farewells are omitted since they usually occur outside of the testing room and consequently outside of recording time. Names of candidates and other identifying information have been removed from the tapes. The opinions voiced on the tapes are, of course, those of the examinees and not necessarily those of their employer. The content of the conversations is important only to the extent that it shows how well the examinee is understanding when spoken to and understood when speaking. Each conversation should be considered first of all as an attempt to communicate within the limits of imperfect linguistic ability and under the strain of an examination. Background noises do exist on the tapes. Occasionally a typewriter or a passing airplane can be heard. The recordings were made in an office, not in a studio. They are realistic examples of tests as described in the narrative section of this manual.

FRENCH TAPES

Test #A- S-0+
(Female candidate)

The examinee comprehends basic questions with extreme difficulty or not at all. Most questions have to be rephrased or simplified.

The interviewer attempts to engage in conversation on topics such as time, weather and numbers. The answers are mainly in monosyllables. Examinee uses some simple sentences with the verbs: être, avoir, and aller. She uses the present tense regardless of the context. Her speech is hesitant and slow.

Test #B- S-1
(Male candidate)

Examinee is able to talk about his work in a very limited fashion. He understands many simple questions. He is able to use a few verbs in addition to être, avoir and aller, but he does not do so consistently. His speech is limited to the present tense regardless of context although he did use the past tense once. He attempts more complicated structure but cannot handle it. e.g. 'nous pensons allons.' He cannot handle the expressions for years, and his pronunciation makes his rendition of numbers doubtful: e.g./2/vs./12/(?)/ /3/vs/13/(?)/. His speech is very slow, and many sentences are not finished.

One amusing touch due to the wrong use of the possessive adjective is:

'...quelque chose de spécial? Oui, ma fille aîneé est là avec votre mari...'

(Note interviewer's reaction!)

FRENCH TAPES

Test #C- S-1
(Male candidate)

Able to meet travel needs. Understands most questions if asked slowly or repeated. Guesses tenses of the questions by context and sometimes misses (ex.: the trip to Houston) Present tense is adequate, but there are some errors. His use of the past tense is erratic: correctly used once, 'je suis allé...'; once with wrong auxiliary + wrong past participle ('je suis étudie') and usually omitted.

Handles time and numbers with great difficulty. Slow speech. Makes an effort to pronounce clearly.

Test #D- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Communication is at normal speed. No hesitations between questions and answers.

Able to discuss his work in spite of poor grammar.

He has some good technical vocabulary, but he resorts to English words once in a while. He uses the past tense, but not consistently and sometimes with the wrong auxiliary.

He sometimes omits the verb of the sentence. He is occasionally unable to finish his sentences (e.g. his trip paid by Pan Am).

He did not understand some questions. His pronunciation is not clear.

FRENCH TAPES

Test #E- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Examinee describes his work with appropriate vocabulary.

Makes up for hesitancy by producing complete sentences; his lively intonation compensates for the obvious effort in pronunciation.

Conversation is at normal speed with some misunderstandings due to non-recognition of helping verbs. Verb endings are not clear. Able to carry on social conversation outside of work and survival contexts.

Test #F- S-2
(Male candidate)

Comprehension good outside of one idiom. Some complex constructions with use of more than one or two verbs. Sometimes the wrong relative pronouns are used.

Cannot use the passive voice. Passé-composé good with an occasional slip. Difficulties with irregular verbs such as vouloir.

Good communication. Good description of his work.

FRENCH TAPES

Test #G- S-2
(Female candidate)

Good variety of subjects. Fluency good. Communication good with some exception due to misuse of verbs. Sometimes answers in the present instead of the past. Usually uses the passé composé well but rarely uses the imperfect and omits the future. Occasionally uses the present tense where the imperfect or the future is required.

There are some problems with pronunciation: Ankara = *Akra and nordique = *nautique

In spite of good fluency, the examinee cannot be rated S-2+ because of limitations of grammar.

Test #H- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Accent good. Able to discuss a good range of subjects, lacking only technical vocabulary. The listener sometimes has to make an effort to follow the examinee's explanations.

There are some anglicisms. He is better than S-2 because he rarely misunderstands and because he is able to give more details. Not an S-3 because he uses passé-composé for imperfect. He completely omits the subjunctive and the conditional.

FRENCH TAPES

Test #I- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Makes up for his slow speech with good grammar. He is limited but careful about his pronunciation, verbs and especially prepositions. Comprehension limited but communication is usually re-established after an initial misinterpretation

Examinee is easy to understand. Some good constructions well above level S-2: e.g. 'Je vais prẽparer des projets pour aider la Mauritanie à subvenir aux besoins de sa population.' good vocabulary: 'le terrain,' 'les rochers,' 'les sources d'eau,' 'le sol.'

Is able to correct himself.

Test #J- S-3
(Female candidate)

Examinee participates effectively in conversation concerning her work as well as other matters. Able to exchange ideas with interviewer. Good use of tenses. passé-composé, imparfait plus-que-parfait are handled well.

Evidence of subjunctive but obvious reluctance to use conditional which she avoids without hindering communication.
(Note team work of interviewer and examiner trying repeatedly to extract a 'si' clause)

FRENCH TAPES

Test #K- S-3
(Male candidate)

Easy relaxed conversation. Examinee even attempts a pun or two. Good description of work. Mistakes do not interfere with communication. For instance. 'De temps *à temps il faut jusqu'à 3 mois ou 4 mois pour *récompenser totalement le changement *qui s'est passé il y a 6 mois.' Uses some complex structures. Good concordance of tenses, but the conditional is not completely under control.

Some anglicisms: *pas aussi beaucoup comme
Short of technical vocabulary. Passive voice not under control.

Test #L- S-3+
(Male candidate)

The examinee is fluent. There are occasional mistakes in prepositions, verb endings and gender.

Uses colloquial French; note the "euh" to mark hesitation, sounds like a native. Able to express himself easily on a wide range of topics.

Verb tenses good, but there are occasional mistakes such as
*si je voudrais.
*je savais bien que c'est...
*j'ai dit toujours que...

FRENCH TAPES

Test #M- S-3+
(Male candidate)

Excellent fluency. Good intonation. There are errors, however, in these areas: object pronouns, prepositions, choice of words based on English.

Discusses wide range of topics with great ease; also well able to defend his opinion in a pleasant manner and style, broad vocabulary and many colloquial expressions.

Test #N- S-4
(Male candidate)

Examinee expresses himself with a certain elegance. Has typically French structures which flow naturally. Has a good choice of vocabulary. Good accent.

One consistent failure is the passive voice

ex: Jaurès *était battu eu 98 (instead of a été)
En 98, il *était battu (instead of avait été)
les documents *étaient détruits (ont été)

Some errors of prepositions:

ex: Je m'intéresse *des élections de 1902.

One or two tenses wrong:

ex: Il y avait des gens qui *ont voulu même le tuer.

FRENCH TAPES

Test #O- S-4
(Male candidate)

Examinee talks fluently on both familiar and completely unexpected subjects. He is willing to discuss anything. Stumbles once in awhile but usually finds the right construction. Very good choice of words.

ex. remous, acharné, des vents qui déblaient, souches

Good use of verb tenses with the exception of the passive voice:

ex. *j'étais très frappé (j'ai été)
*c'était écrit (il a été écrit)
*ce n'était pas traduit (Ça n'a pas été)

Two accidental lapses in use of imparfait instead of passé-composé or plus-que-parfait

ex. un voyage qui *durait 3 semaines (a duré)
il y *avait beaucoup de vie humaine
pendant des années (il y avait eu)

Examples of some beautiful sentences:

'Ils font des recommandations à partir des pressions qui s'exercent sur eux'

il le faut

l'arabe est nettement plus difficile

avant que ce soit ouvert au public

SPANISH TAPES

Test #A- S-0+
(Male candidate)

Having been in Spain for a time, examinee's comprehension is strong point. Obviously there is no grammar control present. Vocabulary is insufficient for even simplest conversation. Oral production is limited to vague utterances and halting attempts at answering. Simple hotel room reservation situation helps confirm whether person is at all functional in language or not.

Test #B- S-1
(Male candidate)

Able to answer simple, direct questions. Appears not able to handle compound sentences yet. Typically, exhibits frequent gender confusion. Vocabulary is limited, though comprehension in straightforward conversation is good. In order to overcome vocabulary deficiencies, he fabricates words resulting in a loss of communication. Able to communicate autobiographical data.

Test #C- S-1
(Male candidate)

Although limited, comprehension is the strong point of this examinee. He has little or no control of grammar in spite of occasional knowledge of some past tense forms. He draws on his knowledge of other languages to reconstruct vocabulary with which he is unfamiliar, and this results in confusion. Can communicate some autobiographical data and could probably handle a survival situation.

SPANISH TAPES

Test #D- S-1+
(Female candidate)

Although grammar is weak, candidate talks readily and more often than not, projects understandable communication. Again, comprehension is strongest point. Pronunciation is generally good and does not interfere with understanding her. At times some structures are "pidgin" such as productos maderas (for productos de madera) and Yo creo que el Secretario esperar que los precios vienen bajo. She's better than "survivalship," but does not have the consistency nor the facility usually associated with the S-2 level.

Test #E- S-1+
(Male candidate)

Impressive vocabulary, fair pronunciation, but weak grammar and comprehension. He has learned to respond quickly to questions, and unless one is attentive one will not realize that some of these quick responses do not relate to the question at all. (Example: Y, además de Ankara, ¿qué otros lugares visitó? His answer: Sí, Ankara es una ciudad muy antigua.) Notice frequent use of either English or heavily Anglicized forms. He is better than mere survivalship, but has at times a very difficult time understanding some of the relatively simple questions. This would indicate that he is not yet able to handle many of the more ordinary situations though he is able to handle some of them well.

SPANISH TAPES

Test #F- S-2
(Male candidate)

Impressive fluency. In general can understand or at least get the gist of most conversation on non-technical subjects. Displays knowledge of tenses and can handle elementary constructions although control is neither thorough nor confident. Frequently says things he does not mean to say. Vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension much more developed than that of an S-1+.

Test #G- S-2
(Male candidate)

Opening of interview is deceptive; one gets the initial impression of a much higher proficiency. As conversation progresses, vocabulary voids appear leading to an inability to understand and to respond at times. (Example: candidate was thrown off by the relatively straight-forward question, ¿Le fue fácil adaptarse a la vida aquí? Yet he exhibits good fluency and resourcefulness (as in defining *pumpas: son máquinas para elevar el petróleo.) Can maintain conversation going at a good rate. Errors are too frequent though, and at times he is incomprehensible; therefore, he is rated S-2 instead of S-2+ or S-3 which are usually thought of as levels requiring general reliability in communication.

Sample errors:
*la ley 'degree'
*es necesito
*mi tanta
*servicio extraño
*pumpas (bombas)
*muy complazando

SPANISH TAPES

Test #H- S-2+
(Male candidate)

An interesting though long interview. Candidate shows good ability to keep conversation going, and can talk on a variety of topics. Vocabulary range appears to be extensive. He is not yet fluent, but he uses or at least appears to be aware of all tenses; he does not control grammar well; the latter appears to be his weakest point. However, most verbs are well organized even though a few times he makes some painfully erroneous classifications: *acceptido for aceptado for example, and aprendió for aprendí.

Difficult case to judge because he appears to fall in the grey area between the upper range of S-2 (S-2↑) and the lower range of S-2+ (S-2+↓). However, once he gets off the travel subject and into more recent experiences, his fluency and accuracy pick up, and he is clearly a 2+. One should note that during the entire interview his reliability in understanding and responding is commendable.

Sample errors:
aprendió for aprendí
está for es
un tarjeta
eses casas
*acceptido for aceptado

SPANISH TAPES

Test #I- S-2+
(Male candidate)

Candidate exhibits a good variety of vocabulary and is thus able to handle a variety of topics. His fluency is fairly good, and he can easily keep a conversation going at a reasonably normal pace. His errors are frequent, but they do not interfere much with comprehensibility. His comprehension is high, and his reliability in understanding and in responding is good. He has fairly good control of present and the two past tenses, and we can assume that he may have other tenses (including some subjunctives) in his repertoire. It is not essential to have subjunctives at this level, though it is always reassuring to hear a few of them.

Sample errors:
lado for largo
tormentos for tormentas
no soy en la sección
cuatros for cuadras
*humididad
*vejículo

SPANISH TAPES

Test #J- S-3
(Male candidate)

(Previous study in High School and College has paid off beautifully; after training at FSI, his grammatical repertoire and accuracy have climbed from an S-1+ into the S-3+ range: a commendable climb.)

Exhibits broad range of vocabulary, appears to be able to converse on almost any topic, has good though not high fluency, and has good control of grammar and verb tenses. Errors are not abrasive and not too frequent. Halting, cautious delivery and frequent repeating or auto-correction keep him from being considered at S-3+ level.

Sample errors:
He tenido cuatro años en la escuela....
este escuela
educación liberal
*absorbar
(hesitation w/gender of conocimiento)

SPANISH TAPES

Test #K- S-3
(Female candidate)

Exhibits good fluency, appears to have a broad vocabulary range, uses all tenses, and has good verb control. Can maintain a conversation going on apparently any subject. Comprehension is good but still not developed enough to pick up long, complicated questions. Halting, cautious delivery, at times almost insecure, especially during the latter part of the interview. This projection of insecurity keeps her from being considered at S-3+ level.

Sample errors:
los escuelas
un de los asuntos
muchas representantes
*responsibilidad
vendas (for ventas)
dos terceros
revuelto

SPANISH TAPES

Test #L- S-3+
(Male candidate)

Able to handle apparently any situation in the language. He has a broad vocabulary, a high level of comprehension, and a very good control of grammar. He may well be able to function as successfully as an S-4, but there is a demonstrated absence here and there of a common vocabulary item (tenedor de libros, empleo for empleado) which makes us suspect that his Spanish is either "rusty" at this moment or that he really is not an S-4. This, plus a scattering of errors make him an S-3+. Grammatical accuracy and near complete, if not complete, vocabulary are essential at the S-4 level.

Sample errors:
ir en Africa
(hesitation with negociaron)
no podían evitar que...salieron
no es que me aburro....
por esto for por eso

SPANISH TAPES

Test #M- S-3+
(Male candidate)

A good example of a person who has complete confidence in his ability to perform easily and with success within the language due to an extended period of isolation and involvement with the language. He sounds very much like an S-4 (freedom of fluency and comprehension, very broad vocabulary) and indeed may function as reliably as an S-4. However, there is an accumulation of errors some of which are not heard at the S-4 level, such as una *pedida, un otro país *crudos. This fact combined with a few misses with the subjunctive, assigns him to the S-3+ level.

(Notice how effective a situation is in drawing a candidate into his normal speech patterns and how effective such situations are in displaying subjunctive consistency or inconsistency. This situation was used at the close of the interview in a final attempt to reach an opinion on his control of subjunctives.)

Sample errors:
una *pedida (for pedido)
los costumbres
(Imperfect for preterite: trabajaba for trabajé;
preterite for imperfect: recibimos for recibíamos)
iba para un otro país
*crudos (for 'crude')
quiero que la puerta se abre
quisiera que viene el carpintero
está bien que queda así
a principio
unos cuatro pulgadas

SPANISH TAPES

Test #N- S-4
(Male candidate)

At this level, errors are few and moreover, are not offensive nor detracting. This candidate exhibits long years of association with Spanish having even assimilated his pronunciation at times to that of native, coastal speech (i.e., aspirated /s/, etc.) He is obviously not a native, but he is obviously able to handle any situation competently: notice how well he handles the delicate and unnerving question concerning the President's program on Human Rights.

Sample errors:
este for esto (only once)
en cuanto los términos...(for en cuanto a)
no se puede dar todos...(for dar a todos)

SPANISH TAPES

Test #0- S-4
(Male candiate)

Speaks language with almost complete fluency, exactness, and breadth of vocabulary. Again errors are few and not detracting. Is assigned S-4 rather than S-4+ because of occasional errors in past subjunctive. Notice that some of the "errors" listed below in parentheses may be injected into a conversation even by a native speaker.

Sample errors:
soy nacido en
parientes (for *padres*)
(*están contentos en la embajada que hay personas*...)
(*no es que hacen falta*)
(*han surgido problemas no solamente en costa Rica pero problemas en el mercado*....)
(*una grande catástrofe*)

SPANISH TAPES

Test #P- S-4+
(Male candidate)

This candidate is not an S-5 because he commits some non-native kinds of errors. (Some errors that may occasionally occur in native speech are in parentheses.) Some errors are always admissible at the S-4 and 4+ levels; otherwise, the candidate would be an S-5.

The accent displayed by the candidate, as well as the account itself, reveals that he has assimilated to porteño Spanish. In this major dialect, as well as in a few other areas of Latin America, present subjunctive is often used where we would expect past subjunctive.

Sample errors:
cinco años y media
un sucursal
lo digo de broma
toda Argentina es sujeto a servir
(salir en huelga)
(le gustaría que esté)
(han habido)

SPANISH TAPES

Test #Q- S-4+
(Male candidate)

This candidate has a native control of phonology, but he is not a native. He makes some mistakes which are not within native norms. (Again, the following list shows non-native errors outside of parentheses.)

Sample errors:
viajé todos los países (for por todos...)
(lo aumentaron) (for lo ascendieron)
representa 1/2 millón de dólares al gobierno (for para el gobierno or le representa...)
(con aquellos dos por ciento)
teníamos que sentar...(sentarnos)
(en años atrás)

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